

MOSAIC PERSPECTIVES: LENTEN SACRED DRAMA IN NAPLES, 1818–1830

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What does it mean to take nineteenth-century sacred music seriously while working from a modern humanities framework? This dissertation explores the tenuous relationship between the Western Christian conceptual tradition of “sacred music” and two Neapolitan Lenten tragic-sacred dramas: Rossini’s *Mosè in Egitto* (1818), and Donizetti’s *Il diluvio universale* (1830). Typological models of sacred music have continued to revolve around a binary sacred/secular opposition that privileges the liturgical repertoires of institutionalized religion. Secondary literature has implicitly placed *Mosè* and *Il diluvio* at the margins of sacred music by describing them as “between the sacred and secular,” a description that silently re-inscribes the binary it seems to deconstruct. This dissertation offers a synchronic genre history of Neapolitan sacred drama and its sympathetic resonance with Lenten rituals such as fasting, prayer, and penitence. In so doing it acknowledges the historical sacred/secular dichotomy while offering new alternatives for viewing Neapolitan theatrical life during the “sacred” Lenten season.

Archival evidence gathered in Naples reveals Neapolitan theaters not as “secular” venues, but rather civic institutions that typologically prefigured experiences of Lenten fasting. Some of the same Old Testament characters that the Church used as typological justifications for fasting also appeared onstage, where audiences perceived them not as “sacred” characters, but rather as “tragic-sublime” characters. This discovery enables a “mosaic” of new perspectives on tragic-sacred drama’s cultural underpinnings as a musical genre. These include ecocritical discourse on

the tragic “catastrophes” of floods in the region surrounding Mount Vesuvius, as well as the musical and allegorical similarities between *Mosè* and the penitential Catholic Requiem Mass.

Sacred drama’s typological resonances were not aesthetically neutral: the “tragic-sublime” Old Testament aesthetic was contingent upon broader historical discourse on Jewish musicality, while the underlying ideologies of catastrophe in *Il diluvio* and repentance in *Mosè* reinforced patriarchal gendered tropes of women’s moral culpability. These observations arise from a combination of score analysis and archival research that situates sacred drama at the intersection of historical musicology, religious studies, and Italian cultural studies.

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PREFACE

Of the many sources of intellectual inspiration that led me to this dissertation project on Neapolitan Lenten sacred drama, two in particular deserve special mention. The first was a 2012 musicology seminar offered by Rachel Mundy on “Animal Musicalities,” which culminated for me in a presentation on New Age nature recordings at the 2013 national meeting of the American Musicological Society in Pittsburgh. This research was driven by a general thematic interest in how music intersects with religious experience, and this interest soon found another historical home during a 2014 musicology seminar offered by James P. Cassaro on operatic innovations at the turn of the nineteenth century. While scanning a list of Rossini’s operatic compositions in search of a term-paper topic, I was struck by *Mosè in Egitto* for its Bible-based title that initially seemed to render the opera an outlier to broader currents of nineteenth-century Romanticism. Upon learning that *Mosè* had been commissioned for Lent, I was reminded of John Rice’s claim that “opera seria put Carnival on the operatic stage: elaborate costumes, disguises, cross-dressing, plots with only the flimsiest resemblance to the historical events on which they are supposedly based, and happy endings.”¹ This vivid quote ended up generating the primary research question behind this dissertation: if opera seria put Carnival on the operatic stage, how might operatic works like *Mosè* have “put Lent on the operatic stage?”

Addressing this research question over the past several years has meant heading down well-marked paths as well as trailblazing new ones. It has meant learning to integrate score-based musical analysis with broader questions of how quasi-religious imagery has been used to represent

¹ John A. Rice, “Mozart’s Operas: Functions, Genres, Archetypes,” in *Mozart on the Stage*, 19-38 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 27.

difference. At the same time, it has meant learning to think critically about civic-religious Lenten practices while simultaneously writing charitably about the nineteenth-century individuals who observed them. Not insignificantly, it has meant learning to speak Italian and travelling to Naples to conduct archival research. And perhaps most of all, it has meant learning to ask for and receive help—financial, intellectual, personal—from a large number of individuals and institutions.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Music Department at the University of Pittsburgh for their ongoing generous financial support during my doctoral studies; to Middlebury College, for supporting an invaluable summer of intensive language study at their Italian School; and to the Andrew Mellon Foundation, for funding a year of dissertation research that enabled me to make an indispensable archival-research trip to Naples in February and March of 2016.

While in Naples I conducted research at the Biblioteca Nazionale di Napoli, the Conservatorio di Musica San Pietro a Majella, the Archivio Storico Diocesano di Napoli, and the Archivio di Stato di Napoli. I am indebted to the many archivists who helped me navigate the library systems, and who were willing to offer me several much-needed crash courses in deciphering nineteenth-century Italian cursive. For their roles in helping facilitate the logistics of my trip to Naples, special thanks go to Guido Olivieri, Roberto Dainotto, Anna Maria Rao, Pasquale Palmieri, and Lucio Tufano. Warm thanks also to my friends at the “Le Vie di Napoli” Bed and Breakfast, for their hospitality and gracious assistance in helping me navigate the city of Naples.

I could not have written this dissertation apart from the patient and insightful guidance of Jim Cassaro, Rachel Mundy, Deane Root, and Francesca Savoia, who through their faithful roles on my committee have been integral in providing feedback on my ideas at every stage of the writing process. Many other individuals have also assisted with this project in a variety of

capacities, be it through informal conversation, providing comments on a draft, or suggesting sources; thanks here go to Paologiovanni Maione, Emanuele Senici, Philip Bohlman, Effie Papanikolaou, Don Franklin, Anna Nisnevich, Emily Zazulia, and Evan MacCarthy. For their role in my intellectual development, thanks go to all of the professors with whom I studied while at Pitt, and also to Antonio Vitti, Alicia Vitti, and Giulia Tellini at Middlebury College. Thanks also to my cohort in the Music Department at Pitt, as well as to many more colleagues within both the national American Musicological Society and within the Allegheny Chapter of the AMS.

Finally, I owe an inestimable debt of gratitude to my friends and family, and especially to my gracious parents: they have learned almost as much about Lenten sacred drama through my studies as I have, and it is to them that I dedicate the following pages of this dissertation.

1.0 INTRODUCTION: IS NOTHING SACRED? SACRED MUSIC AND EPISTEMOLOGIES OF SANCTITY

Are there not many persons who will listen with resignation to compositions containing not even the germ of religious inspiration, provided they are told that the word “sacred” is engraved upon the title-page?

—Henry C. Lunn, “Sacred Music,” *Musical Times* (1868)²

Henry C. Lunn’s words appear hazy to me as I meditate upon two nineteenth-century musical stage works, the libretti of which have the phrase “tragic-sacred drama” (*azione tragico-sacra*) engraved upon their title pages. One is Gioachino Rossini’s *Mosè in Egitto* (Moses in Egypt, 1818, hereafter *Mosè*), which fancifully recounts Israel’s Exodus from Egypt through the parted Red Sea; the other is Gaetano Donizetti’s *Il diluvio universale* (The Universal Flood, 1830, hereafter *Il diluvio*), which rhapsodizes about Noah’s ark and the flood. Both were composed for Lenten performance at Naples’ San Carlo Theater, but at the moment my mind has drifted far away from the social milieu of early nineteenth-century Naples. The tenuous post-Napoleonic restoration of Neapolitan monarchy and Catholicity; the city’s patriarchal strictures, its government-controlled theaters, its proximity to an active volcano: all these must wait, because right now a prophet is about to pray. The tragic pathos of a sublime petition wafts from my speakers like an ether—yesterday it was

² Henry C. Lunn, “Sacred Music,” *Musical Times* 13, no. 306 (August 1, 1868): 474-75, at 474, <https://books.google.com/books?id=Zv5JAQAAMAAJ>. Henry Lunn (1817–1894) served as editor of the *Musical Times*; a brief biographical sketch may be found in Meirion Hughes, *Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism in Great Britain and Ireland* (Ghent, Belgium: Academia Press, 2009), 383.

offered by Noè, today by Mosè—and as I try again to weigh Lunn’s words, those of Mosè prove weightier. After all, when Mosè sings, even “il Dio di Mosè” listens attentively, and the operatic deity forbids the critical interrogation of his tragic-sacred servants while they are singing.

Mosè’s sacred musical refrain begins to fade; yet the lyric autobiographical vignette that I have just written has not concluded, because I still cannot quite decide whether I have penned it in sincerity or in jest. Indeed, it is this very ambiguity that I will use to pose the overarching question of this dissertation: What does it mean to take nineteenth-century sacred music seriously while writing, for lack of a better term, from a twenty-first century non-sacred humanities perspective? As Lunn insinuated nearly a century and a half ago, musicalized claims to sacredness are not always transparent or neutral—a skeptical point of view that is well represented in the humanities today. As a musicologist, my own perspective on sacred music is broadly social-critical. By this I mean that sacred music should not be seen as “set apart” from a number of broader social discourses including politics, religion, gender, and ecocriticism. Even as I broadly locate myself within this collection of social-critical traditions, I find myself wary of approaches that would “see through” sacredness so thoroughly that there is nothing remaining to see. Power certainly circulates through sacred music; but if power is attracted to claims of sacredness, perhaps it is because it recognizes in it a worthy opponent.

It is with these broad epistemological issues in mind that I begin to turn to the more specific topic that this dissertation considers: the relationship between *Mosè* and *Il diluvio*, understood as tragic-sacred dramas, and “sacred music.” Towards this end, this introductory chapter develops a reflexive critical framework for using the idea of “sacred music” to think about *Mosè* and *Il diluvio*, and, conversely, for using *Mosè* and *Il diluvio* to think about the idea of “sacred music.” It is not by happenstance that I am expressing the topic of this introduction in a balanced chiasmic form—

that is, with two inverted statements that become meaningful only when read together in synthetic parallelism. Rather, the very form in which I am expressing my topic reflects some of this dissertation's methodological concerns regarding the synthesis of meaningful cultural-historical knowledge. I will develop these principles in more detail over the course of this introduction, but in short order they deal with attempting to reconcile a number of otherwise seemingly opposed concepts and methods, including particularist understandings of cultural history and comparative methods, deductive and inductive modes of cultural-historical inquiry, and diachronic and synchronic approaches to cultural-historical narration. As I will suggest, such synthetic interplay requires exploring the fine lines that exist between historiography, history, and (hi)storytelling.

At the broadest level, the two inverted halves of the chiasmus mentioned above provide the loose organizational framework for this introduction. In the first section of this chapter ("Using 'Sacred Music' to think about *Mosè* and *Il diluvio*"), I consider how two otherwise-obscure Lenten tragic-sacred dramas have found a primary discursive home at the fringes of the Western Christian musical-philosophical tradition known as "sacred music." Although this tradition is no longer recognized as absolute or uncontroversial, its historical-conceptual relationship to works like *Mosè* and *Il diluvio* cannot therefore be simply dismissed. Quite the contrary: productive critical interrogation of these tragic-sacred dramas requires engaging them precisely in relation to this Western tradition of sacred music and its complex historical roots in hierarchical and typological modes of thought.

A primary impetus for this first section has been the need to engage with encyclopedic modes of knowledge creation and organization pertaining to music and sacredness. There is an idea that knowledge can be catalogued in an orderly deductive fashion, or that an understanding of a term's etymology offers a transparent window onto its reality: such encyclopedic values

continue to exert a certain allure long after their rise to prominence during the Enlightenment. Indeed, the fact that the first three chapters of this dissertation investigate a handful of historical and modern encyclopedias as primary sources attests to the permanence of encyclopedic perspectives, both on the Italian peninsula in the early nineteenth century and today. Knowledge creation certainly requires organization; yet I fear that knowledge cannot be categorized so neatly. The source of this “encyclopedic anxiety” is an awareness that, even as encyclopedists may try to offer a balanced perspective on a given topic, such perspectives are not therefore omniscient but are instead necessarily circumscribed within a certain vantage point with its own points of focus and blurriness. Thus, I am particularly interested in hierarchical models not for their centers of focus, but rather the margins: those decentering places where one finds objects that do not quite belong, yet cannot quite be omitted. Sacred dramas, as I will suggest, constitute such objects within hierarchical models of sacred music.

In the second section of this chapter (“Using *Mosè* and *Il diluvio* to think about ‘Sacred Music’”), I set out to reassess these two tragic-sacred dramas’ relationship to hierarchical models of sacred music and to diachronic models of genre history. While hierarchies and timelines as data-organization tools are useful for creating certain types of knowledge, the type of knowledge I am seeking to create surrounding *Mosè* and *Il diluvio* is more synchronic in nature. The basic contention that I explore here is that “tragic-sacred drama” should not be seen as a transparent descriptive genre label attached to a series of “between sacred and profane” Lenten stage works (many based loosely on Bible stories) performed in Naples between circa 1770 and 1830.³ By contrast, my perspective on *Mosè* and *Il diluvio* as tragic-sacred dramas is more inductive in nature.

³ Not all operas performed in Naples during Lent were settings of Bible stories or were otherwise overtly religious in nature. For a cross-sectional perspective on theatrical life in Naples during Lent, see the [Appendix](#) at the end of this dissertation.

Specifically, I begin to suggest how some of the salient Lenten themes and topics arising from *Mosè* and *Il diluvio*—themes including prayer, penitence, moral catastrophe, purgation, and judgment—might be seen as resonating with parallel themes across a broader cross-section of Neapolitan culture. In this way, the rhetoric of “tragic-sacredness” is shown to exist in symbiotic relationships with a number of discourses external to the theater, even as the designation itself has its historical roots in the theater.

Although the Lenten penitential themes mentioned above are themes proper to Roman Catholic dogma, my scholarly perspective on these themes will not therefore simply be as one writing from the perspective of State-sponsored religious dogma. Instead, I will delineate my perspective as a cultural historian through something akin to a penned performance of the encyclopedic anxiety described above; that is, I approach my subject matter by attempting to merge multiple perspectives. The resulting historical portrait of Lenten sacred drama in early nineteenth-century Naples will resemble something like a cubist painting, with its subjects seen from a plurality of juxtaposed perspectives. These perspectives will not always coexist comfortably—indeed, the perspectives of nineteenth-century ecclesiastical officials, Bourbon Restoration politicians, and modern critical theories are not always reconcilable. Nevertheless, the exercise is valuable precisely for the resultant angular perspective on sacred music’s historical points of focus, and, more importantly, its blurry margins.

1.1 USING “SACRED MUSIC” TO THINK ABOUT *MOSÈ* AND *IL DILUVIO*

Why *Mosè* and *Il diluvio*? It must be admitted that neither work has a particularly high profile within Rossini and Donizetti’s respective oeuvres.⁴ Although most musicologists would be comfortable describing *Mosè* as one of Rossini’s stylistically “mature” operas—Rossini composed it for Naples in 1818, five years after he had already seen his first major successes with *Tancredi* and *L’Italiana in Algeri*—*Mosè* nonetheless tends to be overshadowed by other works that the composer wrote shortly before it, including *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (1816) and *La Cenerentola* (1817). By contrast, Donizetti composed *Il diluvio* near the end of his so-called period of “apprenticeship” (ca. 1822–1830); often understood as a “developmental” work, *Il diluvio* tends to be overshadowed by the premiere later that year of *Anna Bolena* (1830), which was Donizetti’s first real operatic success.⁵ Yet I am not primarily concerned with surveying these works’ positions within diachronic developmental narratives about their respective composers’ compositional styles. Rather, I am interested in how these works have been understood in relation to a specific Neapolitan tradition, and, more specifically, how “sacred music” has provided an implicit framework that scholars have used to understand these works.

Mosè and *Il diluvio* are perhaps slightly better known as the respective apex and conclusion of Neapolitan Lenten sacred drama, a tradition often seen as coming to prominence in the 1780s with works such as Giuseppe Giordani’s *La distruzione di Gerusalemme* (1787) and Pietro

⁴ While this broad statement is admittedly difficult to measure, one might consider the frequency with which *Mosè* and *Il diluvio* appear in general reference works on opera. To cite one example, I note that neither work is mentioned in the reference volume, edited by Amanda Holden, entitled *The Penguin Concise Guide to Opera* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).

⁵ Mary Ann Smart and Julian Budden, “Donizetti, Gaetano,” *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed May 31, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

Alessandro Guglielmi's *Debora e Sisara* (1788).⁶ Within this context—and as a broad summation of trends in the secondary literature on *Mosè* and *Il diluvio*—I suggest that scholars have traditionally understood both works as existing somewhere “between the sacred and the secular/profane.”⁷ This categorization has stemmed in large part from a comment about *Il diluvio* that Donizetti himself made in a letter to his father on 4 May 1830, where he describes his new opera as “dividing the genre of secular music from the sacred” (“dividere il genere di musica profano dal sacro”).⁸ Scholars proceeding from these points have generally described how Neapolitan sacred drama mixes “profane” or “secular” dramatic-stylistic elements of opera with “sacred” elements of oratorio and ecclesiastical music. Of particular note in this regard is the research of musicologist Franco Piperno, whose writings about the lack of cabalettas and presence of ecclesiastical styles in *Il diluvio* have proved foundational for how subsequent scholars have understood this work and its position as the culmination of Lenten sacred drama in Naples.⁹

I am not out to challenge the findings of scholars whose meticulous historical research on Neapolitan Lenten sacred drama has, in one sense, made possible my own research on this

⁶ For a listing of Lenten works performed in Naples between 1760 and 1820, see Franco Piperno, “‘Stellati sogli’ e ‘immagini portentose’: opere bibliche e stagioni quaresimali a Napoli prima del *Mosè*,” in *Napoli e il teatro musicale in Europa tra sette e ottocento: studi in onore di Friedrich Lippmann*, ed. Bianca Maria Antolini and Wolfgang Witzemann, 267-98 (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1993), 296-98.

⁷ I will use the terms “secular” and “profane” somewhat interchangeably throughout this dissertation. It is worth noting that the Italian word *profano* can be translated into English as “lay” in the sense of “laity”; thus *profano* does not necessarily connote the same sense of “vulgarity” as the English cognate “profane.”

⁸ Quoted in Franco Piperno, “‘Dividere il genere di musica profano dal sacro’: Donizetti vs Rossini? Su *Il diluvio universale* e la tradizione Napoletana di opere quaresimali,” in *Donizetti, Napoli, l'Europa: Atti del convegno di studi, Napoli, 11-13 dicembre 1997*, ed. Franco Carmelo Greco and Renato di Benedetto, 201-30 (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 2000), at 213. Unless otherwise stated, all English translations of Italian-language primary and secondary sources throughout this dissertation are my own.

⁹ *Ibid.*

tradition. However, I do want to explore the implications of recycling Donizetti's early nineteenth-century phraseology in using the sacred/secular dichotomy as a modern framework for creating historical knowledge about sacred drama. I am not denying that "sacred/secular" was a meaningful musical dichotomy in 1820s Naples; indeed, the language of this dichotomy continues to circulate in various guises in contemporary music scholarship. I am arguing, however, that locating sacred drama at the fringes of "sacred music" is neither a neutral nor transparent mode of knowledge construction. To appropriate the language of two well-known texts from cultural anthropology, understanding sacred dramas like *Mosè* and *Il diluvio* as lying "betwixt and between" the sacred and secular risks framing them as liminal "matter out of place"¹⁰ within a bounded cultural system. In other words, the resulting image of Neapolitan sacred drama can too easily be that of a hybrid genre, the product of generic difference that exists in the void between sacred and secular as stable musicalized categories.

In the present academic climate, it is hardly a stretch to claim that "sacred music" represents a destabilized musical category. As one indicator of current attitudes, one might consider how the seemingly critical question "What is 'sacred music'?" now provides an ironic locus for understanding a broader musicological reaction against positivistic models of abstract knowledge creation.¹¹ This reaction is intertwined with New Musicology's criticism during the 1990s of

¹⁰ My references with these quotations are to two classic structural approaches to cultural anthropology. "Betwixt and between" refers to Victor Turner's theory of liminal stages in cultural initiation rites; "matter out of place" refers to Mary Douglas's explanation of dirt within systems of ritual purity. See Victor Turner, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*," in *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, 93-111 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967); Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 2002 [1966]), 44.

¹¹ It is telling, for example, that the question "what is sacred music?" furnished the title for an article of serious musicological investigation in 1927; after nearly a century, this article could now be evaluated as a primary source in its own right. See Orlando A. Mansfield, "What is Sacred Music?" *Musical Quarterly* 13, no. 3 (1927): 451-75.

canons of musical repertoire. Prior to the 1990s, “sacred music” *writ large* connoted a trans-historical canon of Western (Judeo)-Christian liturgical and devotional music deemed worthy of formal analysis.¹² Understood as such, one might say that sacred music was twice sacred—in addition to any religious associations, it was “set apart” and sheltered from the gaze of critical inquiry. Yet attitudes towards this formulation of sacred music subsequently started to change as musicologists began questioning the historically specific mechanisms by which “universal” canons of musical repertoire were created and maintained. As canons were put on trial as being a type of strong-armed gerrymandering that secured the interests of their creators, “sacred music” was implicitly scrutinized as a musical front that normalized and “sanctioned” traditional Eurocentric constructions of sacredness.¹³ While the phrase “sacred music” remains in circulation within music scholarship, scholars who use the term tend now to do so critically in relation to culturally specific sacred-music performance or philosophical traditions.¹⁴ At the very least, such studies have made one point clear: that discussions about “sacred music” have now become meta-discussions. At a

¹² Although its exact borders were hazy, “sacred music” was generally understood to include such repertoire as Catholic chants and Mass-settings, J.S. Bach’s cantatas, and concert settings of Christian religious texts.

¹³ Insofar as identifying and unveiling normalized Eurocentric values has been a major focus of musicological inquiry over the past quarter-century, critical scholarship on “sacred music” has loosely mirrored the broader discipline’s foci on critical analyses of identification processes relating to gender, ethnicity, nationhood, and religion. As one example of this, Anna Maria Busse Berger has noted how the early twentieth-century German musicologist Friedrich Ludwig’s teleological interpretation of medieval music was influenced by his own investment as a Lutheran in the “Palestrina Revival.” Anna Maria Busse Berger, “Prologue: The First Great Dead White Male Composer,” in *Medieval Music and the Art of Memory*, 9-44 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

¹⁴ Jonathan Arnold, *Sacred Music in Secular Society* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2014); Philip V. Bohlman, *Revival and Reconciliation: Sacred Music in the Making of European Modernity*, *Europea: Ethnomusicologies and Modernities*, #16 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2013); Virinder S. Kalra, *Sacred and Secular Musics: A Postcolonial Approach* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2003).

level of abstract removal, those who choose to talk about “sacred music” must now talk about how they talk about this equivocal signifier.

Why, then, sacred music? Even as “sacred music” has increasingly become a subject of critical inquiry, it is noteworthy how hierarchical models of sacred music remain in use as organizational systems in encyclopedic perspectives on music and sacredness. To understand how *Mosè* and *Il diluvio* have fit into this discussion as sacred dramas, consider the description of sacred music offered by Joseph P. Swain in the introduction to his *Historical Dictionary of Sacred Music*, a reference volume that the author targets to a wide audience of scholars and performers invested in one or more traditions of “sacred music.” Acknowledging the Sisyphean task of producing an all-encompassing framework of sacred music, Swain suggests that “even in a Western context, what counts as ‘sacred music’ is not simply a matter of the music heard in a church or synagogue. The category appears to admit of degree—works can be more or less sacred.”¹⁵ Swain proceeds to spell out a provisional organizational scheme for the compendium, in which the epicenter of sacred music lies in the corporate liturgies of institutionalized religious worship:

The most sacred would be liturgical music, music explicitly required as part of a ritual, such as a sung mass, a psalm in a vespers service, or a required proper hymn. Next would come devotional music apart from liturgy, either personal or public: processional songs, Italian *laude*, songs from the *Sacred Harp* collection sung in homes, etc. These two categories dominate the middle ages and Renaissance in Europe and the early colonial period of North America and represent the sacred/secular distinction at its strongest, secular music being any sort neither liturgical nor devotional.

Thereafter, the categories branch out and the distinction blurs. A third kind of Western music often considered sacred, but not without qualification, is music composed on Bible stories or lives of saints but with little connection to liturgy or to private devotions and often belonging to no particular sect of Christianity. Such compositions flourished after the invention of opera just before 1600, when art music in general began to acquire strong narrative and dramatic properties and to take on a larger role in public entertainment, to reach into the growing middle and

¹⁵ Joseph P. Swain, *Historical Dictionary of Sacred Music* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006), xviii.

mercantile classes, to attain, in short, the status of an art to be contemplated for its own sake without having to accompany some cultural activity.¹⁶

Although Swain does not specifically mention the phrase “sacred drama” in this passage, readers are expected to understand it as falling somewhere between the second and third categories in this typological model of sacred music.¹⁷ Swain’s implicit account of sacred drama’s marginal status within “sacred music” can be corroborated by cross-referencing Graham Dixon’s entry on the closely related term “sacred opera” in the *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. It is noteworthy that Dixon’s overview description of this phrase resonates with the same sort of ambiguity regarding liturgical function and religious content that Swain uses to describe the third category in his typological model. According to Dixon,

Opera with sacred or religious connotations has existed at most periods in the history of the genre. The term “sacred opera” has no standard usage: it may be applied to dramatic works written for, or performed in, an ecclesiastical or other religious context, but equally to operas designed for normal theatrical performance and involving a religious theme or bearing some moral or spiritual statement, or even ones that involve a deity, in the form of a god or an oracle.¹⁸

On the one hand, the very existence of this entry seems to validate “sacred opera” as a meaningful musicological category. Furthermore, the entry’s diachronic organization around sacred opera’s “manifestations in different social, religious and intellectual climates over the 400 years of the

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ One might group (tragic)-sacred drama together along with a whole slew of common Western musical genre designations overtly connoting sacred or religious pageantry; such designations might include oratorio, liturgical drama, sacred opera, biblical opera, and passion plays, mystery plays, morality plays, and miracle plays on the lives of saints.

¹⁸ *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, ed. Stanley Sadie (New York: Macmillan Press Limited, 1992), s.v. “sacred opera” (by Graham Dixon), vol. 4, 118. A nearly identical version of this article now appears in Grove Music Online; one notable update to the entry is Richard Taruskin’s contributed section on “Rubinstein’s sacred operas.” See Graham Dixon and Richard Taruskin, “Sacred opera,” *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera, Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed June 14, 2017, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

history of opera”¹⁹ suggests that scholars have traditionally understood the genre as being populated by such works as Cavalieri’s *Rappresentazione di Anima, et di Corpo* (1600), Handel’s oratorio *Esther* (1718, 1732), Rossini’s *Ciro in Babilonia* (1812) and *Mosè in Egitto* (1818), and Verdi’s *Nabucco* (1842). On the other hand, Dixon’s summative statement highlights the need for grounding the category of “sacred opera” in inductive historical approaches to sacred opera/drama. For example, what constitutes a “religious theme” or a “moral or spiritual statement”? How are such statements made and sustained not only within the drama of a given sacred opera, but also within the broader cultures where it is composed, performed, and received? At a higher level, how might the rhetoric underlying those moral statements resonate sympathetically with other cultural discourses not otherwise directly tied to the theater? In short, how might the salient features within a specific Lenten tragic-sacred drama and its numerous performance contexts be seen as arising to inform broader discourse on the category of sacred drama—and sacred music by implicit extension?

1.2 USING MOSÈ AND IL DILUVIO TO THINK ABOUT “SACRED MUSIC”

Having reached the crux of the chiasmus, I now set out to address the set of inductive questions posed above to consider how the salient themes of *Mosè* and *Il diluvio*, understood as Lenten tragic-sacred dramas, might inform “sacred music.” Of course, pure induction is impossible; one must begin with some sort of guiding idea about the category one is exploring. With this caveat in mind, I will explore “sacred music” by considering how the themes of repentance, judgment, and

¹⁹ Ibid.

deliverance that arise from the plots of these two tragic-sacred dramas might be seen as resonating with Catholic doctrine about Lent during the political turbulence of Naples' Bourbon Restoration.

Taken at face value, both *Mosè* and *Il diluvio* are stories of repentance, judgment, and deliverance. In *Mosè*, the Hebrews are enslaved in Egypt by Pharaoh. After Mosè relieves Egypt from the plague of darkness, Pharaoh agrees to let the Hebrews go. But there is a conflict of interests: the Prince of Egypt is in a clandestine relationship with Mosè's niece, Elcia, and to let the Hebrews go would mean losing his love. As the plot unfolds, Mosè finally convinces Elcia to repent and to side with duty to her people over romantic love; by contrast, the unrepentant Prince of Egypt is killed by a lightning bolt representing the plague on the firstborn. After a prayer for deliverance (the chorus "Dal tuo stellato soglio," which Rossini added to the score in its 1819 revised edition), the opera ends with the Hebrews crossing the Red Sea while the Egyptian army drowns under its waves.

A parallel story of deliverance unfolds in *Il diluvio*—indeed, the dramatic parallels between these two operas have been a common point of departure in the secondary literature.²⁰ In *Il diluvio*, the dramatic tension arises from two opposed groups of people: Noè's God-fearing family, and the wicked royal court of the fictional city of Sennáár, who seek to burn Noè alive in the ark that he has built at God's command. A link between these two groups is the character of Sela; the wife of a wicked King named Cadmo, Sela has been worshipping God secretly along with Noè's family. But when one of Cadmo's jealous concubines discovers and reports Sela's duplicity to Cadmo, Sela must make a choice. Will she choose to worship God, or to fulfill her familial duties as wife and mother? Very reluctantly, Sela chooses her family, only to fall down dead upon making her

²⁰ For a comparison of the similarities in plot structures between *Mosè* and *Il diluvio*, see Piperno, "Dividere il genere di musica profano dal sacro," 212.

decision. The next moment the rain begins and drowns Cadmo's unrepentant entourage, while Noè's clan finds deliverance in the ark as it rises safely upon the flood waters.

On the surface, the moral themes of repentance, judgment, and deliverance emerge through the plots of these tragic-sacred dramas. Yet these general moral themes are conveyed via specific imageries and narrative devices that need to be unpacked. As a starting point, I would note that these moral themes find a loose parallel with themes propagated in Catholic doctrine in relation to the penitential season of Lent. What sympathetic cultural resonances might have arisen, then, between Lenten religious sanctity in Naples and the sacred dramas commissioned for and performed during Lent?

The question I have just posed—comparing the themes of tragic-sacred drama with the penitential rhetoric of Lent—is hardly neutral, because *Mosè* and *Il diluvio* were composed during a turbulent time in Naples' history when claims to sacredness were tied to political ideology. During the Napoleonic era, the Neapolitan Bourbon Monarch Ferdinand IV had fled to Sicily and Napoleon ultimately gave control of Naples to his brother-in-law, Joachim Murat. Following Napoleon's downfall in 1815, Ferdinand returned from exile and had Murat executed. Ferdinand's restored reign as monarch of the newly formed Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (1816) was characterized by an unusual mixture of social liberalism and political conservatism; Ferdinand retained many of the innovative French social reforms, and he initially promised amnesty to those who had supported the French during Murat's rule.²¹ Nevertheless, Ferdinand's rule quickly took a more conservative turn characterized by violence towards liberal supporters. The balance

²¹ Mark Jarrett, *The Congress of Vienna and its Legacy: War and Great Power Diplomacy after Napoleon* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 231.

between traditional and liberal agendas ultimately proved unstable, however, and in 1820 Naples witnessed a liberal revolution and the installment, albeit temporarily, of a liberal constitution.²²

Of particular interest at present is the restoration of powers to the Church that it had lost under Napoleon's rule. In Lent of 1818, several weeks before *Mosè*'s premiere, Ferdinand ratified a Concordat of Unity with Pope Pius VII that proclaimed Catholicism as the only permitted religion in the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies; this was done in a bid to solidify their shaky powers following the downfall of Napoleon.²³ Historian John Santore has further noted that, by the terms of this concordat, "monasteries and ecclesiastical courts were reestablished, bishops were given the right to censor the press and supervise education, and the Pope alone was granted the privilege of consecrating religious officials within the state."²⁴ It was against this political backdrop that Catholics on the Italian peninsula were taught by the Church that the forty-day Lenten liturgical season preceding Easter was the "most sacred" season of the year.²⁵

²² John Santore, *Modern Naples: A Documentary History, 1799–1999* (New York: Italica Press, 2001), 101-116.

²³ Ratified twelve days after Ash Wednesday and published in the *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie* on Easter Monday, the terms of the Concordat asserted unequivocally that "The Roman Apostolic Catholic religion is the only religion of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies; and it will always be preserved there with all the rights and prerogatives that are under its jurisdiction, according to the ordination of God and the canonical sanctions." ("La religione cattolica apostolica romana è la sola religione del regno delle Due Sicilie; e vi sarà sempre conservata con tutti i dritti e prerogative che le competono, secondo l'ordinazione di Dio e le sanzioni canoniche.") "Concordato fra Sua Santità Pio VII Sommo Pontefice, e Sua Maestà Ferdinando I Re del Regno delle Due Sicilie," *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, no. 69, 23 March 1818, p. 277, Neapolitan Section, National Library of Naples.

²⁴ Santore, *Modern Naples*, 102.

²⁵ As one priest wrote to his parishioners in 1834, "We are now in Lent, at that time of the year that the Church calls the most sacred..." ("Siamo a Quaresima, a quel tempo cioè dell'anno, che la Chiesa chiama sacratissimo...") Giuseppe Righetti, *Del digiuno e della quaresima, lettere due di Giuseppe Righetti, sacerdote romano: Dirette a giustificare il digiuno e la quaresimale astinenza contro le false imputazioni e ad istruire i fedeli in varie questioni spettanti il digiuno: edizione seconda, riveduta e notabilmente aumentata dall'autore* (Roma: Tipografia delle Belle Arti, 1834), 3, <https://books.google.com/books?id=hb3gb9tT5HsC>.

How, then, should one understand *Mosè* and *Il diluvio* as sacred dramas composed for the “sacred” season of Lent? Given the alliance in Naples between Church and State, the claim that Lent was merely religious and not political appears indefensible. After all, the Neapolitan authorities during these years were highly aware of the precariousness of their position, and they harnessed the power of opera to control the means of communicating political propaganda. As John A. Davis has noted regarding theaters in nineteenth-century Southern Italy, “[i]n a world where other means of communication—the press and informal public assembly—were banned, the theater offered urban, educated Italians the opportunity to be entertained and to congregate lawfully in a public place.”²⁶ In such a political context, only music that was not deemed a threat to the established order would be sanctioned for theatrical performance.

It might be tempting to speak about *Mosè* and *Il diluvio* not as works of “Lenten theater” but rather as works within “The Theater of Lent,” particularly as the poetics of the formulaic phrase “The Theater of (blank)” could be easily commandeered by any number of politicized theoretical agendas. I would not be the first to approach Lent as a political-economic arena,²⁷ and sometimes

²⁶ John A. Davis, “Opera and Absolutism in Restoration Italy, 1815-1860,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36, no. 4 (2006): 569-94, at 572. The generally low price of theater tickets in early nineteenth-century Italy suggests that the audience base at the San Carlo was not restricted to the financially elite. As one author noted in an 1839 guide book for those traveling in Italy, “[t]he entertainment [in Italy] is not very expensive. There is no country in Europe where entrance to the theaters is less expensive. At La Scala in Milan, the San Carlo in Naples, and in all the principal theaters of the other cities, the admission ticket is never more than three francs, unless there is some extraordinary circumstance; and this price diminishes according to the season.” (“I divertimenti non sono assai dispendiosi. Non vi ha paese in Europa dove l’entrata ai teatri sia meno costosa. Ne’ teatri della *Scala a Milano*, di *S. Carlo a Napoli*, ed in tutti i principali delle altre città, il biglietto d’ingresso non è mai maggiore di tre franchi, a meno che non vi concorra qualche circostanza straordinaria; e questo prezzo diminuisce secondo le stagioni.”) Ferdinando Artaria, *Nuovissima guida dei viaggiatori in Italia, V. edizione* (Milano: Presso Ferdinando Artaria e figlio, 1839), iii, <https://books.google.com/books?id=M7cLAAAAYAAJ>.

²⁷ I refer here in particular to Jacques Attali and his political-economic analysis of Carnival and Lent. Through a clever interpretation of the Renaissance-era painting *The Battle between Lent and Carnival* (1559) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Attali theorizes “Festival, Masks, Penitents, [and]

it will be useful to consider Lenten theater in terms of the dynamic power negotiations that enveloped it. Yet while I will not be writing as a champion of historical Catholic dogma, neither will I write as one championing the dogma that religion is merely a power play. Neither approach will be productive in producing a three-dimensional model of human experience in which power and meaningful religious experience inevitably coexist. What is needed, rather, is a way of thinking about the social experiences connected with sacred drama in ways grounded in the categories and themes of the time.

As a working solution, I will sometimes choose to write from the imaginary interpretive perspective of what might be called a historical participant-observer: in this case, as one generally familiar with the comparative thought patterns as evidenced in the writings of early nineteenth-century ecclesiastical officials on the Italian peninsula, but who ultimately employs those thought patterns to develop themes more closely rooted in twenty-first-century humanities social-critical values. From within this perspective, I will explore the comparative concept of typology. Although typology has been used in different ways in various disciplines, I am thinking of typology in the sense of the historically Christian mode of biblical hermeneutics, in which a character or event in the Old Testament is interpreted as a “type” that finds its poetic fulfillment in the life of Christ or the Church.²⁸ I would note that the stories of both Noah and Moses are found in the portion of the

Round Dance” as symbolic emblems of “[t]he four possible statuses of music and the four forms a society can take.” Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi, *Theory and History of Literature* 16 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1985), 23.

²⁸ Within Western Christian theological traditions, typology has been employed as a symbolic technique for interpreting images from the Old Testament appearing in stained glass windows; see, for example, Herbert L. Kessler, ““They preach not by speaking out loud but by signifying””: Vitreous Arts as Typology,” *Gesta* 51, no. 1 (2012): 55-70. Although it is not my purpose to offer an exhaustive overview of how “typology” has been used in other discursive contexts, it is insightful to note typology’s etymological relationship to the word “stereotype”: literally, a “hardened” form of thought regarding individuals within a given group. Seen from this perspective, “typology” has historical ties to a number of problematic racist and essentialist

Bible that has often been referred to as the “Old Testament” (in Italian, either *antico testamento* or *vecchio testamento*) from within Christian perspectives.²⁹ I will be using this well-established historical phrase not for any sense of supersedence, but rather because typological comparison will provide the basis for the sort of social criticism that I want to do.

Specifically, I will be thinking about typology as a framing device. In this regard my intellectual agenda builds upon the work of anthropologists Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern on ritual framing:

We are concerned with ritual as practice and performance rather than as an ideal or notional category, and therefore with “ritualization” as a process that gives special values to actions. And we use the concept of “framing” to discuss how some behavioral processes are explicitly set off from others as a way of emphasizing values associated with them and endowing them with meanings.³⁰

From this formulation of ritualization, it is only a short step to understanding either “sanctification” or “sacralization” as dynamic interactive processes whereby things become set apart when properly framed. On framing, Stewart and Strathern further explain that “Pictures contain an image within a frame. The frame does not define the subject of a picture in terms of its content, but it does place a boundary around it, and the character of the frame itself blends with the picture.”³¹

This concept of framing radically changes what it means for something “sacred” to be “set apart”³²

discourses. For one overview on the historical relationship between typology and racial science within the field of physical anthropology, see Rachel Caspari, “From Types to Populations: A Century of Race, Physical Anthropology, and the American Anthropological Association,” *American Anthropologist* 105, no. 1 (2003): 65-76.

²⁹ It is perhaps worth noting that the Latin Vulgate was the official translation used by the Catholic Church during the nineteenth century.

³⁰ Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern, *Ritual: Key Concepts in Religion* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 1-2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

³² In linking the concept of “sanctification” with that of “setting apart,” I am offering a new interpretation of Durkheim’s understanding of sanctity as expressed in his classic and much-debated sociological definition of religion: “A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and surrounded by prohibitions—beliefs

and leads to a core critical conviction of this dissertation: namely, that objects or practices deemed “sacred” may be “set apart” in some ways but not in others, and that there is nothing so completely set apart that it has no connection whatsoever to other cultural phenomena. Furthermore, such totalizing “sacred vacuums” would hardly be worth investigating, because the most interesting features of supposedly sacred things are precisely how they connect in meaningful ways to other cultural practices. From this perspective, Lent was “sanctified” in early nineteenth-century Naples not by processes that completely set it apart from the rest of the year, but rather by processes that deeply integrated it within broader cultural trends.

1.3 CHAPTER DESCRIPTIONS

One of the purposes of this dissertation is to demonstrate how Old Testament figures were deployed to “frame” and ritualize Lenten experience. The figure of Moses in particular attracted a number of symbolic interpretations in nineteenth-century Italy, including Moses understood as a typological source of Lenten fasting ([Chapter 2](#)); as the “sublime” musical inventor of the ecclesiastical chorale ([Chapter 3](#)); and, in leading the Israelite Exodus from Egypt, as a typological symbol of release from Purgatory ([Chapter 5](#)). To a secondary extent, the figure of Noah also factors in, particularly as the Noachian flood was understood as a gendered symbol of moral ruin ([Chapter 4](#)). The typological associations of these characters are particularly pertinent to the concept of ritualized Lenten “sacredness” as described above—“set apart” but not severed—

and practices that unite its adherents in a single moral community called a church” (italics original). Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman, abridged and with introduction and notes by Mark S. Cladis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008, 2001 [1912]), 46.

because typological interpretation “elevates” and “sets apart” only by connecting the object in question to the (earlier) thing that it is seen as fulfilling.

A prominent feature of Lent was fasting as a practice imbued with typological significance. While fasting is an intrinsically physical discipline, experiences of fasting were considered to be typologically prefigured. [Chapter 2 \(“Fasting and Typology in Lenten Theater”\)](#) explores the role of Neapolitan theaters in prefiguring and reinforcing the interpretive filters by which Lenten fasting was experienced. I go about exploring this in two different ways. The first of these is the concept of the spiritual fast. While fasting is perhaps best-known today as a practice pertaining to individual dietary piety, at least one nineteenth-century Lenten pastoral letter refers to an all-encompassing “spiritual fast” that extended to prohibiting even theater attendance. Archival evidence gathered in Naples reveals that Neapolitan opera-goers at the San Carlo typically abstained from various types of dancing, gambling in the atrium, and even occasionally abstained from theater attendance itself, sometimes by way of closing the theaters. Understanding theater closures as a form of civic-religious fasting challenges the idea of the theater as merely a “secular” venue disconnected from meaningful processes of Lenten ritual, and so contributes a theatrical perspective to a broader scholarly debate about the role of ritual in daily life.³³

A second related typological aspect of fasting is how the Church cited Old Testament characters as the typological origins of Lenten fasting. It is significant that Old Testament characters frequently appeared not only in ecclesiastical documents seeking to legitimize the

³³ One recent voice in this discussion has been sociologist Massimo Rosati. In revisiting Durkheim’s perspective on the sacred and secular, Rosati suggests that “if we are unaware, in our daily lives, of the role that ritual and the sacred play in all these spheres [raising our children; politics; religions], it is because we take for granted a particular understanding (Protestant-like) of religion, and a particular understanding (secularized) of social life, of the Self, of politics, and so on.” Massimo Rosati, *Ritual and the Sacred: A Neo-Durkheimian Analysis of Politics, Religion and the Self* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 5.

Lenten fast, but also appeared frequently on Neapolitan theatrical stages during Lent. To begin to account for these conspicuous ecclesiastical-theatrical parallels, Chapter 2 concludes by theorizing “sublimation” as an implicit form of early nineteenth-century Catholic typology whereby the negative “shadows” of the Old Testament were seen as being superseded by positive “figures” in the New Testament.

The typological connotations of the Latin core *sublim-* were not peculiar to ecclesiastical discourse on the Old Testament, but rather characterized cultural imaginations about the Old Testament more broadly. In [Chapter 3 \(“Typecasting the Old Testament: Tragic-Sublime Characters in Tragic-Sacred Drama”\)](#), I explore “sublimity” as an alternative to the sacred/profane binary for understanding tragic-sacred drama as a genre. Archival evidence reveals that Old Testament figures like Noah and Moses were consistently imagined in Naples as “sublime” literary characters typified by “tragic pathos.” Neapolitan sacred dramas codified this tragic-sublime image musically to such an extent that by 1826 the music-encyclopedist Pietro Lichtenthal could refer to a “tragic Character or style, which combines sadness with force and sublimity” (“il Carattere o stile tragico, il quale combina la tristezza colla forza e sublimità”).³⁴ Significantly, Lichtenthal’s theoretical description of this tragic-sublime musical style closely aligns with the styles present in the musical prayers “Dal tuo stellato soglio” (newly added in the 1819 revised version of Rossini’s *Mosè*) and “Dio tremendo” (in Donizetti’s *Il diluvio*). By highlighting the tragic sublimity of these prayers, this chapter responds to a growing musicological reluctance to connect sublimity with affective-musical experience in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries; in doing so, it brings Neapolitan sacred drama into dialogue with discourses of

³⁴ Pietro Lichtenthal, *Dizionario e Bibliografia della Musica: del dottore Pietro Lichtenthal*, vol. 1 [A-K], s.v. “caratteri” (Antonio Fontana: Milano, 1826), 143, <https://books.google.com/books?id=f9uzJ6j-OA0C>.

nineteenth-century sublimity that have typically revolved around the music of German-speaking lands.³⁵

Although this chapter bypasses the essentially differential phrase “between sacred and profane” that has permeated secondary literature on Neapolitan tragic-sacred drama, it would be short-sighted to describe “tragic sublimity” as an entirely referential phrase. Chapter 3 concludes by examining a deeper critical sense in which this aesthetic is contingent upon a specifically typological brand of difference. Referencing critical literature on historical Christian-Jewish relations, I demonstrate how the tragic-sublime “sonic image” of Old Testament characters intersected with problematic typological discourse on Judaism and Jewish musicality (or the perceived lack thereof) in the early nineteenth century. These findings transcend the realm of nineteenth-century historicity to inform *Mosè*’s somewhat turbulent reception history in the twenty-first century, during which time the opera has been staged at least once as a historical lens for interpreting modern political turbulence between the states of Israel and Palestine.

The social-critical perspective on tragedy in Chapter 3 veers onto a slightly different track in [Chapter 4](#), entitled [“\(Ante\)-Diluvian Catastrophes: Tragedy and Blame in Donizetti’s *Il diluvio*.”](#) While secondary literature on *Il diluvio* has primarily highlighted Donizetti’s reliance on Rossini’s *Mosè* as a model of tragic-sacred drama, in this chapter I view tragedy in *Il diluvio* as arising from the overlapping cultural senses of “catastrophe” that resonated throughout the opera’s original cultural context. Referencing literature on the representation of physical catastrophes in the nineteenth century, I explore how “narrative immersion in the diegetic present” of *Il diluvio* was

³⁵ Citations for the secondary literature referred to in these chapter descriptions may be found within the chapters themselves.

contingent upon a broader “heterodiegetic knowledge”³⁶ of floods as catastrophes. In *Il diluvio*, heterodiegetic diluvial knowledge stemmed not only from the sublime image of the Noachian flood as narrated in the Bible and in derivative literary and artistic sources, but also from geological discourse about the nature of catastrophe and causation. As such, this chapter represents a case study that positions *Il diluvio* within a growing scholarly interest of how “high” scientific discourses of geology intersect with popular social imaginaries of floods.

Floods were a source of interest in 1820s Naples: not only were there new geological theories about the Genesis flood, but the ongoing volcanic activity of Mount Vesuvius also generated a number of damaging floods as “secondary catastrophes” in the nearby town of Nola. Significantly, the rhetoric of avoiding blame for these floods (as found in official government correspondence) resonates with a crucial moral moment in *Il diluvio*. Through a close reading of the opera’s finale, I suggest how the “catastrophic” moral failure of the opera’s heroine, Sela, is framed as “precipitating” the flood; the opera’s denouement thus resonates with a historical instance of patriarchal typological logic that traced the blame for the flood back to Eve’s sin. In this way the moral Lenten message about purgation of sins that emerges in *Il diluvio* is not neutral, but rather is expressed through gendered rhetoric that framed moral ruin—catastrophe—as feminine.

The gendered themes of purgation explored in *Il diluvio* take on renewed symbolism in [Chapter 5 \(“Penitential Genres: Exodus and Purgatory in Rossini’s *Mosè*”\)](#), which theorizes how the ritualizing “frame” of Lent transformed *Mosè* into a performance of purgatory. I achieve this by highlighting and analyzing similarities between *Mosè* and the rite of the Roman Catholic

³⁶ Nicholas Daly, “The Volcanic Disaster Narrative: From Pleasure Garden to Canvas, Page, and Stage,” *Victorian Studies* 53, no. 2 (2011): 255-85, at 274.

Requiem Mass, the ritual funeral service in which the priest prays for the deceased to be released from Purgatory. As a retelling of the Exodus, *Mosè* bears striking textual and musical similarities to nineteenth-century settings of the Requiem's "Dies irae" sequence of texts that describe the Apocalypse. *Mosè*'s musical stylistic similarities to the Requiem Mass have so far gone entirely unnoticed, and this chapter introduces a speculative history of those connections through a theoretical parallel reading of the two. I demonstrate how both narratives are linked by a theological tradition of typological interpretation. Specifically, my reading of *Mosè* draws on a literary tradition stemming from Dante in which the Exodus functions as an allegory for release from purgatory. Lenten performances of *Mosè* thus constituted a theatrical model of the penitence required in purgatory. Ultimately, the *Mosè*/Requiem comparison helps to highlight how the archetypal Christian theme of repentance has been expressed through musical topics that are prefigured in gendered terms.

The chapters described above approach Neapolitan Lenten sacred drama from a variety of perspectives and draw on diverse sets of evidence. To conclude this introduction, I would highlight a poetic meaning of this dissertation's primary title—*Mosaic Perspectives*—that has so far gone unaddressed. In addition to being the adjectival form of the name "Moses," the word "mosaic" also designates the artistic technique in which numerous inlaid tiles or bits of glass are juxtaposed to form a larger picture. A mosaic is inherently pointillistic and additive in nature; its fuller picture begins to emerge only as the viewer backs away and allows the diverse individual materials to create the illusion of a unified whole. It is in this metaphorical sense that I describe this dissertation as a "mosaic" that holds together the diversity of themes and perspectives described above.

While I do not necessarily claim the "mosaic" metaphor to be ideologically unbiased or neutral, it nevertheless addresses the delicate play of deductive and inductive perspectives that I

have deliberately chosen in situating sacred drama within Lenten cultural-religious practice over the next four chapters. On the side of deduction, it is difficult to speak meaningfully about Lenten musical practice without directly addressing concepts such as fasting, prayer, and penitence that have come to emblemize the season. Yet on the side of induction, to reduce Lent to a series of reified emblems risks overlooking the hidden critical ideologies that underlie Lenten “sanctification.” Because every study must have a starting point, the critical impulse must remain in check, lest the study undermine the very ground of its existence. However, exercised in the right proportion, a selective critical deconstruction of categories tills the soil for productive “reconstruction” of new discourses. New interpretive insights invariably sprout forth as hard distinctions dissolve between sacred and profane, religious and secular. Even maintaining a hard distinction between Carnival and Lent can border on the ineffective; for fast is never far from feast and fête. From fat and ashes rises the Phoenix.

What does it mean to take nineteenth-century sacred music seriously while writing from a non-sacred humanities perspective? Mosè’s sublime song now echoes only faintly in my mind, and now I can now begin the critical work of relating Lenten sacred drama to the tenuous post-Napoleonic restoration of monarchy and Catholicity; to the city’s patriarchal strictures, its government controlled theaters, its proximity to an active volcano. Yet of course the critical work has already begun. Lying as it does at the convergence of historiography, history, and storytelling,³⁷ writing does not merely convey research: writing performs research. The cultural actors involved in the “sacred music” I consider were highly imaginative; to take them seriously one must try to rise to their level.

³⁷ Joan W. Scott, “Storytelling,” *History and Theory* 50, no. 2 (2011): 203-209.

2.0 FASTING AND TYPOLOGY IN LENTEN THEATER

LENT: season of penitence that precedes the Easter holiday, during which one must fast to prepare to celebrate Easter devoutly. It lasts forty-six days [...]. Sundays are excepted for the fast, [but] not for abstinence, which must be equal to the other days. Lent was prefigured in the fasts of Moses [...], and in that of Elijah [...], and put in practice by Jesus Christ [...]. See Abstinence: Fast: Mortification: Penitence.³⁸

—P. Mataléne, *Universal and Analytical Index of the Holy Scripture*, 1843

Abstinence, fasting, mortification, penitence: according to Catholic doctrine, these virtuous practices emblemize the Lenten season. In this chapter I use the lenses of abstinence and fasting to view a series of theatrical practices during Lent in early nineteenth-century Naples. While Lenten abstinence and fasting may be most commonly understood as dietary practices pertaining to individual religious piety,³⁹ in Catholic Naples they also constituted broader principles that affected theatrical life in various official and unofficial ways. At the level of civic ordinances, Lenten abstinence brought about a series of official theater closures during the Lenten season; and

³⁸ “QUARESIMA: tempo di penitenza, che precede la festa di Pasqua, durante il quale bisogna digiunare per prepararsi a celebrare santamente la Pasqua. Dura quaranta sei giorni (*). Le domeniche sono eccettuate per il digiuno, e non per l’astinenza, che deve essere eguale a quella degli altri giorni. La quaresima è stata prefigurata nei digiuni di Mosè: *Esod.* 24, 18. Decalogo: *Esod.* 34, 28. Terra: *Deut.* 9, 9, 18, ed in quello di Elia: *3 Re* 19, 8; e mess[a] in pratica da Gesù Cristo: *Luc.* 4, 2. Vedi Astinenza: Digiuno: Mortificazione: Penitenza.” P. Mataléne, *Repertorio universale ed analitico della santa scrittura* [...]: Opera compilata con un metodo affatto nuovo [...]: tomo secondo ed ultimo, trans. (from the French original to Italian) C. Zardetti (Milano: Tipografia Libreria e Pirotta, 1843), s.v. “quaresima,” 521, https://books.google.com/books?id=x8W_G6IP0GkC.

³⁹ It is worth noting how the phrase “individual religious piety” implies a *de jure* separation of church and state that was banned in Naples following the expulsion of the French in 1815. With Catholicism officially reestablished as the exclusive religion and with the Restored Bourbon monarchy ensuring the interests of the Church in the newly formed Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, Naples was a place where religious and civic discourse tended to blur together. For a political perspective on the Bourbon Restoration in Naples, see Santore, *Modern Naples*, 102.

at a less formal yet culturally intuitive level, theatrical stages during Lent were populated with Old Testament characters whom the Church viewed as having “prefigured” the Lenten fast. Understanding these phenomena not simply as haphazard Lenten traditions but rather as “workings-out” of deep-seated cultural principles of Lenten abstinence and fasting reveals Naples’ theaters as prominent civic institutions through which Neapolitans sanctified Lent as a civic-religious season.

According to Jacques Attali, Lent has invited symbolic interpretation in terms of “emblems,” a point that is evidenced not only in religious Catholic dogma but also in secondary critical discourse.⁴⁰ Speaking about fasting as an “emblem” of Lent is not a neutral cultural-analytical mechanism, for at least two reasons. First, emblematic approaches to Lenten fasting could risk imposing a reductive and unified perspective on what is inherently a multifaceted concept.⁴¹ Secondly, the conceptual nature of symbolic emblems might seem to clash with fasting as an intrinsically material practice. Yet to borrow the vocabulary from a recent critical dialogue in musicology, fasting blurs the boundary between the “drastic” and the “gnostic”: while the experience of fasting is at once corporeal, sensory, and physically embodied (“drastic”), such immediate experience is always mediated in some sense through the interpretive filters of cumulative prior experience and internalized values and ideologies (“gnostic”).⁴² Certainly the

⁴⁰ Attali, *Noise*, 23.

⁴¹ While I am focusing specifically on Catholic religious fasting and abstinence, the borders separating spiritual fasts from hunger strikes or medical conditions such as eating disorders are admittedly hazy. For one perspective on these overlaps, see Jo Nash, “Mutant Spiritualities in a Secular Age: The ‘Fasting Body’ and the Hunger for Pure Immanence,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 45, no. 3 (2006): 310-27. For a perspective tied more directly to Catholic experience, see Kathleen M. Dugan, “Fasting for Life: The Place of Fasting in the Christian Tradition,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, no. 3 (1995): 539-48.

⁴² Instances of the word “gnostic” throughout this chapter are meant to refer simply to “knowledge” rather than to the first-century Greek philosophy of Gnosticism. See Karol Berger, “Musicology

“drastic” is more difficult to theorize than the “gnostic”; indeed, the very act of theorization itself would seem to be a “gnostic” activity. While in this chapter I deal with what might be called the “drastic” to a slight extent, my primary focus will be on the role of Neapolitan theaters in constructing and reinforcing the “gnostic” interpretive filters of Lenten fasting. Consequently, this approach addresses the first concern by giving a more inductive perspective on the diversity of symbolic and ideological networks by which Lenten fasting was perpetuated.

This chapter unfolds in two sections. In the first section I explore the concept of fasting from the theater during Lent in early nineteenth-century Naples. I begin by considering some general conceptual features of nineteenth-century Catholic fasting, including a historical sense in which the principle of fasting was extended beyond dietary practice to include theater attendance. I then use these principles to highlight the fast-like qualities of certain instances of Lenten theater closures in 1820s Naples. With their striking homologous similarities to other types of Lenten abstinence and fasting, Lenten theater restrictions helped to sanctify Lent as a civic-religious season in early nineteenth-century Naples.

After having established a connection between Lenten fasting and theater closures, in the second section I develop a framework for exploring how Neapolitan Lenten theatrical performances reinforced the “gnostic” underpinnings of Lenten fasting. It is significant that some of the same Old Testament characters that the Catholic Church cited as prefiguring the Lenten fast—most notably Moses—also populated Neapolitan theatrical stages during Lent. I explain how the typological function of the Old Testament in ritualizing the Lenten fast informs the presence of Old Testament characters on Lenten stages. The chapter concludes by theorizing Old Testament

According to Don Giovanni, or: Should We Get Drastic?” *Journal of Musicology* 22, no. 3 (2005): 490-501; Carolyn Abbate, “Music—Drastic or Gnostic?” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 505-36.

characters' typological role in an aesthetic-spiritual form of elevation that I am calling "sublimation." Given their association with fasting, Old Testament characters provided an appropriately elevated and "sublime" focal point for audience members who were themselves expected to be observing the Lenten fast.

2.1 FASTING FROM THE THEATER

Before offering a justification for exploring the theater as an object of Lenten fasting and abstinence, it should be mentioned that Catholic Lenten religious fasting has historically been conceived as a dietary practice.⁴³ For example, historical medical discourse helps explain how religious fasts functioned in general, and what they were supposed to achieve. Consider the following account of religious fasting in an 1829 book from Florence, entitled *Istituzioni di Medicina Forense* (Institutions of Forensic Medicine).⁴⁴ The author was a medical professor named Giuseppe Tortosa, and in a section entitled "The Ecclesiastical Fast" ("Il digiuno ecclesiastico") he discusses the physiological processes by which fasting slows down the body's organs and allows for heightened spiritual awareness:

. . . thus to relax [the body's organs] of their speed, and to moderate their vivacity, no other means can better succeed than the fast in weakening the tempting passions. Lessening in fact the abundance of food, taking only the least nourishment, and

⁴³ As just one example, an 1828 dictionary defines "fast" as "Eating [only] how much of [only] that which is appropriate for observing the order of the holy Church regarding vigils and days when abstinence is commanded" ("DIGIUNARE. Mangiar quanto e quello che conviene per osservare il precetto di santa Chiesa circa le vigilie e i giorni che è comandata l'astinenza"). *Dizionario della lingua italiana*, vol. 3, s.v. "digiunare" (Padua: Tipografia della Minerva, 1828), 176, <https://books.google.com/books?id=XppLAQAAMAAJ>.

⁴⁴ Giuseppe Tortosa, *Istituzioni di medicina forense di Giuseppe Tortosa, Professore medico della Commissione Dipartimentale di Sanità di Bacchiglione: volume secondo* (Firenze: Presso Celli e Ronchi, 1829), <https://books.google.com/books?id=fhWNXegnrpsC>.

eating only once per day, the healthy and robust person should feel a reduction of voluptuous excitement by the subtraction of stimuli. But who doesn't see that observing the ecclesiastical fast [. . .] must make it easier for the faithful to immerse themselves in religious considerations, meditating with tranquil stillness of spirit [on] the revealed truths, and enjoying the happiness caused by practicing the Christian virtues?⁴⁵

According to Tortosa, religious fasting offers its practitioners something that might be described as a cathartic effect: fasting decreases physical vigor, but compensates by presenting this same characteristic in spiritual form.

Although Tortosa only addresses the physical-spiritual effects of fasting from meat, it is clear that, at least later in the nineteenth century, Catholic authorities were concerned with working out the implications of fasting for cultural practices beyond diet. This issue emerges most clearly in the concept of the “spiritual fast” as explained by Francesco Pedicini, the Archbishop of Bari and Canosa (in the southeastern region of Puglia), in his 1871 publication *Modo pratico di santificare la Quaresima* (Practical Means for Sanctifying Lent). After addressing fasting from meat, Pedicini explains that “[b]eyond [fasting from food], the Church has [prescribed] for you a spiritual fast, which according to San Leone is the basis and purpose of every other fast, and it consists in abstaining from everything that is blameworthy or that easily gives occasion to sin.”⁴⁶ Pedicini then applies this spiritual fast to the practice of attending the theater. He argues that even

⁴⁵ “così per allentarne la prontezza, e moderarne la vivacità, nessun altro mezzo può riuscir più opportuno che l'affievolire il fomite appetitoso con il digiuno. Minorando in fatti la copia degli alimenti, non assumendo che i meno nutrivi, e pascendosi una sola volta al giorno, l'uomo sano e robusto deve per la sottrazione degli stimoli sentire una degradazione di voluttuoso eccitamento. Chi non vede però, che l'osservanza del digiuno Ecclesiastico [. . .] deve render più facile alli fedeli l'immergersi nelle religiose considerazioni, il meditare con tranquilla quiete di spirito le verità rivelate, ed il gustare la beatitudine proveniente dall'esercizio delle cristiane virtù?” Ibid., 40.

⁴⁶ “Oltre a che vi ha un digiuno spirituale, che al dir di S. Leone è base e scopo di ogni altro digiuno, ed è riposto nell'astenersi da tutto ciò che è colpa, o che dà facilmente occasione a peccare.” Francesco Pedicini, *Modo pratico di santificare la Quaresima* (Bari: Tipografia Cannone, 1871), 16, <https://books.google.com/books?id=mVQNfxOTNwMC>.

if one had a legitimate health condition that prevented fasting from food, one could not use the same excuse to justify theater attendance:

And what reason could ever excuse us from a fast so essential and so necessary for every Christian? One can say that because of sickness one cannot abstain from meat: others can rightly say that the hard strains caused by their condition do not permit them to observe the unique commixture prescribed in the fast. But can one also say, “I can’t abstain from going to the theater and to public performances [that were] once so commendably prohibited by the same civil laws in the holy season of Lent?” Can another also say: “I can’t abstain from participating in pleasant conversations”; “I can’t abstain from music, from songs, from dancing [that is] so unseemly during this time of sacred sorrow?”⁴⁷

In extending the “spiritual fast” beyond diet to the theater, Pedicini provides valuable nineteenth-century historical justification for exploring abstinence and fasting as malleable Lenten principles that were applied in different areas of culture. Yet to what extent do Pedicini’s comments reflect Neapolitan attitudes towards Lenten theatrical practice some fifty years earlier? From one perspective, Pedicini’s description of the “unseem[li]ness” of dancing during Lent resonates with official policies at Naples’ San Carlo Theater in the 1820s. Based on the longstanding cultural conviction of it “not being decent to introduce balls during Lent,”⁴⁸ the San Carlo Theater

⁴⁷ “E qual ragione potrà mai scusarci da un digiuno sì essenziale, e sì necessario ad ogni cristiano? Potrà uno dire che per ragione d’infermità non può astenersi dalle carni: può altri aver ragione di dire che le dure fatiche, a cui è obbligato dalla sua condizione non gli permettano di osservare l’unica commestione prescritta nel digiuno; ma potrà anche dire: io non posso astenermi dall’andare a’ teatri, ed a’ pubblici spettacoli sì lodevolmente proibiti una volta dalle istesse leggi civili nel tempo santo di quaresima? Potrà anche dire: io non posso astenermi dall’intervenire ad amene conversazioni: non posso astenermi da suoni, da canti, da balli tanto sconvenevoli in tempo di sacro lutto?” Ibid., 16-17.

⁴⁸ “non essendo decente che s’introducano i balli nella Quaresima.” This statement dates from a 1795 government correspondence regarding a Lenten production of the oratorio *Saulle*. The author refers to a scene in which prima ballerina Carolina Pitrot was to stand behind a screen to evoke the shadow of the prophet Samuel’s ghost; the author wanted to make sure that this instance of pantomime did not spill over into an instance of dancing. Letter from Marchese Demarco to unnamed recipient, 21 December 1795, Soprintendenza dei teatri e spettacoli, container 2, State Archive, Naples. I express my gratitude to Lucio Tufano for bringing this document to my attention.

abstained during Lent from the “grand ball” parties common to Carnival,⁴⁹ as well as from the ballets that were otherwise performed in tandem with operatic performance. Furthermore, in line with Pedicini’s historical reference to civil laws prohibiting theater performances during Lent, Neapolitan theaters were indeed occasionally closed during Lent. In general between 1818 and 1830, all of the Neapolitan theaters were consistently closed for four days at the start of Lent (Ash Wednesday through Saturday), on every Friday during March, and for the entirety of Holy Week (Palm Sunday through Holy Saturday).⁵⁰ These closures would also have kept theater-goers from the gambling tables that routinely ran in the atrium of the San Carlo.⁵¹

While these practices corroborate the existence of a metaphorical Lenten “spiritual fast” as applied to the theater in Naples, giving up dancing or the theater for a few days during Lent might

⁴⁹ Throughout the 1820s, there were generally around ten balls held in the San Carlo between mid-January and Fat Tuesday. Official correspondence regarding these balls is conserved in the following archival source: “Feste da ballo nei RR. Teatri, 1803 al 1864,” Teatri e Spettacoli, Deputazione e Soprintendenza Commissione amministrativa Prefettura, container 31, State Archive, Naples.

⁵⁰ Specific theater closures are indicated in the Register of Theatrical Performances (expounded more fully in the [Appendix](#)). The pattern of Lenten theater closures indicated above was enforced consistently in the Neapolitan theaters between 1818 and 1830, with the exception of Lent in 1826 (the register does not include data for 1824). Fasting from theater attendance was not unique to the Lenten season: several times each year the restored Bourbon monarchy closed all of Naples’ theaters for major religious and civic observances. In addition to the Lenten theater closings listed above, all the theaters of the city were consistently closed for the following observations: January 16–17, for the vigil and feast day of St. Anthony Abate; for two separate seventeen-day closures in April or May and September for an adjacent *novena* and *ottavario* (nine- and eight-day prayer vigil, respectively) honoring San Gennaro, Naples’s patron saint; and for nine days during Advent for a *novena* immediately preceding Christmas. Theaters were also closed on an *ad hoc* basis for other civic or religious occasions that arose.

⁵¹ Historical evidence reveals a partial “fast” during Lent of 1817 from the gambling tables that were otherwise open in the atrium of the San Carlo. Official correspondence debated how much of an indemnity (between 2,000 and 4,000 ducats) ought to be awarded to theater contractor Domenico Barbaja for having to close down the gambling tables during Holy Week. “Chiarimenti sulla indennità a Barbaja per la sospensione de’ giuochi né giorni di giovedì e venerdì santo, 1817,” Amministrazione generale della Cassa di Ammortizzazione e del Demanio pubblico, container 211, file 5163, State Archive, Naples.

seem to be a trivial “token” fast when compared with the effects of a perpetually empty stomach. After all, Lenten fasting was a serious matter in Naples. One abstained from common sustenance to receive the sustaining bread of life in the Eucharist, a poetic chiasmic exchange that neither the Church nor State took lightly: civic permission to break the Lenten fast had to be granted by official government ordinance.⁵² In the brief cultural analysis that follows, I extend the comparison between Lenten religious fasting and theater closures. I am choosing to write from the perspective of a theater-goer who buys into the principle of fasting. In doing so, my purpose is not to deny the validity of a perspective that would interpret fasting as a political bid by officials of the Catholic Church and Bourbon Restoration government to solidify their powers against the threat of revolution. Instead, I seek to suggest something of the logic by which Lenten religious observation affected theatrical life.

On at least one occasion in the 1820s, metaphorical spiritual fasting was taken to an extreme that rivaled the dramatic heights of abstaining from meat. I now turn my attention to a unique act in Lent of 1826 that revealed the centrality of theater to Neapolitan civic-religious life: in order that the gates of Paradise might remain open, the Neapolitan authorities ordered that all the doors to Naples’ theaters be closed. The impetus for Naples’ totalizing spiritual fast from theater was a proclamation from Pope Leo XII instituting a six-month period of Jubilee to begin

⁵² That the monarchical government exercised a degree of authority in overseeing the Lenten fast is corroborated through official correspondence once located in Naples’ State Archive. Although the document is unfortunately no longer found in its indicated numerical place in the collection, its entry within the archive’s online catalog describes its contents as follows: “Regarding giving permission to the inhabitants of the capital to eat prohibited food during Lent, given the lack of oil and its raised price, 1817” (“Sul permesso da accordarsi agli abitanti della capitale di mangiare cibi proibiti durante la Quaresima, a causa della mancanza dell’olio e del suo aumentato prezzo, 1817”). Ministeri degli affari interni, Inventario I, Serie Commercio, Agricoltura, Arti e Manifatture 1808 – 1833, container 2083, fascicle 24, State Archive, Naples. The description is available at <http://patrimonio.archiviodistatonapoli.it/asna-web/patrimonio/agricoltura-e-commercio/esito.html?queryLibera=quaresima>.

on the first Sunday of the approaching 1826 Lenten season. The special purpose of the Jubilee was to encourage a pilgrimage to four prescribed basilicas to earn a plenary indulgence—that is, a full remission granted by the Church for the temporal punishment of sins that would otherwise require cleansing in purgatory. With its penitential purpose, it was appropriate that the Jubilee should have coincided with the Lenten penitential season, and this point was not lost on the Archbishop of Naples, Luigi Ruffo-Scilla. In announcing the Jubilee to the city’s clerical community on 25 January 1826, the Archbishop urged his audience “[...] to devote all your energy to sanctifying this time, which is called in the Holy Scriptures *a time of propitiation for all the earth, and a time of remission for all those who inhabit it.*”⁵³ Yet how were Neapolitans to answer the Archbishop’s lofty exhortation to sanctify this special Lenten season? The response, in part, had come five days earlier in a 20 January notice to Naples’ theater impresarios circulated by Duca di Noja, the head of Naples’ Deputation of Theaters and Shows:

His Excellency the Minister of Internal Affairs, having written on the 18th of the current month, in effect has shared with this Deputation of it having been determined by His Majesty, that in the upcoming Lent all the theaters must remain closed, and that every sort of show is prohibited during said time. The deputation shares as much with you for your intelligence so that the notice be passed along to all the impresarios of the small itinerant theaters.⁵⁴

⁵³ “Vi esortiamo [a]dunque nelle viscere di Gesù Cristo a mettere tutto il vostro sforzo per santificare questo tempo, che è chiamato nelle Sante Scritture *tempo di propiziazione per tutta la terra, tempo di remissione per tutti coloro, che l’abitano*” (italics original). Pastoral Letter from Archbishop Luigi Ruffo-Scilla “to all the monks, novices, oblates, and women who live in the cloister of the monasteries, or in other religious and pious houses and communities, in the colleges, temples, conservatories, and in retirement,” 25 January 1826, Pastoral, file 5, Diocesan Historical Archive, Naples.

⁵⁴ “S[ua] E[ccellenza] il M[inistr]o degli Affari Int[ern]i con Lo scritto de’ 18. M[ese] corr[en]te in efe[tto] ha partecipato a q[uest]a Deputaz[i]one di essere da S[ua] M[aestà] risoluto, che nella ventura Quaresima tutt’ i teatri debbono restar chiusi, e che sia proibito ogni sorta di Spett[aco]lo in d[ett]o tempo. La Deputaz[i]one vi partecipa tanto ciò p[er] v[ost]ra intelig[enz]a Perché ne passiate avviso a tutti gl’Impres[ari]i de teatrini ambulanti.” Notice from Duca di Noja to all the impresarios of Naples, 20 January 1826, Teatri e spettacoli—Deputazione, Soprintendenza, Commissione amministrativa Prefettura, container 5 (“Registri copia lettere ed ordini della Deputazione e della Soprintendenza, 1824 al 1828”), vol., 3 p. 355, State Archive, Naples.

In short, Neapolitans were to “sanctify” Lent as a corporate civic-religious season by abstaining completely from the theater.⁵⁵

Closing all of Naples’ theaters during Lent bore significant social and economic liabilities that warrant viewing it as something more than a metaphorical “spiritual fast.” Insofar as theater in general was subjected to strict government regulation and censorship, the theater represented a basic mechanism of social-political stability;⁵⁶ therefore, a total fast from theater during Lent meant abstaining from that mechanism of stability. Furthermore, closing all Neapolitan theaters for the entirety of Lent was a costly financial decision resulting in forgone revenue, with apparently only the most prominent of impresarios being reimbursed for their losses.⁵⁷ In this political-

⁵⁵ In Naples’ official register of theater performances between 1813 and 1832, the entry for 8 February 1826 reads as follows: “General prohibition of all shows for the entire course of Lent—that is, from 8 February through all of Holy Saturday on 25 March—because of the Jubilee” (“Proibizione generale di tutti i spettacoli pel corso dell’intera quaresima, cioè dal dì 8 Febbraio a tutto il Sabato Santo 25 Marzo a causa del Giubileo”). Because this official government register would have been written to reflect official proclamation, any unauthorized theater performances would not likely have been included in the register even if the clerk in charge of keeping this register was aware of them. For this reason, the extent to which this total ban on theatrical performance was actually enforced remains unknown, particularly in regard to smaller theaters. “Registri relativi agli spettacoli ed alla revisione teatrale—1813 al 1832,” Soprintendenza Teatri: Teatri e spettacoli—Deputazione—Soprintendenza Commissione amministrativa Prefettura, container 3, volume 5, p. 50r, State Archive, Naples.

⁵⁶ Regarding Lenten theater specifically, Franco Piperno has suggested that Neapolitan Lenten opera in the 1780s was a form of political control in the years leading up to the French Revolution; see Piperno, “‘Stellati sogli’ e ‘immagini portentose,’” 272.

⁵⁷ During a session of the Deputation of Theaters and Shows held on 9 February 1826, the committee agreed to reimburse theater impresario Domenico Barbaja for the loss of income that he would have otherwise gained from Lenten performances at several Neapolitan theaters; these indemnities included but were not limited to “3000 [ducats] for 14 performances that [Barbaja] would have been able to give in the said time [of Lent] in the Royal San Carlo Theater” (“3000_ per 14 recite che avrebbe potuto dare in detto tempo nel R.le teatro S. Carlo”). Session minutes of the Deputation of Theaters and Shows, 9 February 1826, Soprintendenza dei teatri e spettacoli, Deputazione e Soprintendenza Teatri: Decisione della Deputazione, Soprintendenza e Commissione amministrativa, container 2, vol. 3 (“Libro degli appuntamenti principiato il dì 23 Agosto 1824”), p. 72r, State Archive, Naples.

economic sense, the theaters were food for a vital social organ—as essential to social life as food is to biological life. Although Neapolitans may not have directly experienced Lenten theater in 1826, in its social and economic absence they knew what it was to fast.

The total “spiritual fast” from theater during Lent of 1826 was a notable exception to Naples’ usual pattern of Lenten theater closures in the 1820s, but it was an exception nonetheless: the simple fact is that Neapolitan theaters were generally open during Lent. While it might then seem that theater attendance was only rarely pertinent to the concept of fasting, patrons abstaining from the theater is only one part of the equation I am exploring. As noted earlier on, the drastic experience of “fasting itself” is not easily isolated from the systems of gnostic symbolism that prefigure it. Now in the second half of this chapter, I will suggest that the characters that were most frequently seen onstage during Lent—Old Testament characters—represented elevated and symbolic “pre-figures” of Lenten fasting.

2.2 OLD TESTAMENT TYPOLOGIES OF LENTEN FASTING

Old Testament characters were common fixtures on Neapolitan theatrical stages during Lent in the early nineteenth century. In addition to Rossini’s and Donizetti’s respective tragic-sacred dramas on Moses and Noah, theaters in early nineteenth-century Naples staged productions featuring a number of Old Testament characters, including Jephthah, Abraham, Saul, David, Deborah, and Gideon.⁵⁸ Yet why were Old Testament narratives so common during Lent in Naples? The

⁵⁸ For a listing of bible-based musical works staged during Lent in Naples between 1798 and 1820, see Franco Piperno, “Il *Mosè in Egitto* e la tradizione napoletana di opere bibliche,” in *Gioachino Rossini, 1792–1992, il testo e la scena: convegno internazionale di studi, Pesaro, 25-28 giugno*

apparent suitability of staging Old Testament narratives during Lent cannot be adequately explained by simply noting that these stories appear in the Bible, were thus vaguely “religious” or “sacred,” and were therefore appropriate for Lent as a “religious” or “sacred” season. While not incorrect, this explanation overlooks how Old Testament characters onstage during Lent resonated with a symbolic ecclesiastical tradition that traced the roots of Lenten religious practice back to the Old Testament.

The symbolic tradition to which I am referring is that of typology. Typology is a historically Christian mode of biblical interpretation in which an Old Testament story or character is read as a “type” that finds a higher poetic and parallel fulfillment in the life of Christ or the Church as related in the New Testament. Numerous typological readings of the Old Testament have been made, both within the New Testament documents and by subsequent commentators. While not all of the Old Testament characters seen on Neapolitan stages have historically invited typological comparison with the New Testament, at least Noah and Moses have. As one example of typology with roots dating back to the fifth century, St. Augustine argued that the role of Noah’s ark in rescuing human and animal life rendered it “certainly a figure of the city of God sojourning in this world; that is to say, of the church, which is rescued by the wood on which hung the Mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”⁵⁹ In the case of Moses, the concept of typological comparison was extended beyond the New Testament to furnish the “gnostic” underpinnings of Lenten fasting in the early nineteenth century.

Old Testament characters like Moses were often cited by ecclesiastical authorities as typological progenitors of Lenten fasting. For example, P. Mataléne’s encyclopedia entry on

1992, ed. Paolo Fabbri, 255-71 (Pesaro: Fondazione Rossini Pesaro, 1994), 269. For further information on Neapolitan theater in general during Lent, see the [Appendix](#).

⁵⁹ Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2014), 465.

“Lent” quoted at the start of this chapter interprets the forty-day Lenten fast as “prefigured” by the forty-day fasts of not only Christ but also Moses and Elijah. Pedicini constructs exactly the same pedigree of Lenten fasting in the opening lines of his previously cited 1871 Lenten Pastoral Letter:

The Holy Lawgiver Moses, who had prodigiously saved the Israelite people from bondage in Egypt, [by] fasting and praying for forty days merited to receive the law of the Old Covenant from the hands of the Lord on Sinai; and for forty days the Prophet Elijah had also fasted and prayed when he saw (as far as is possible for man here on earth) the glory of the Lord; and in the fullness of the times God’s own Son, our Savior Jesus Christ also wanted to fast and pray for forty days in the desert before announcing the new law of grace to the people of Israel.⁶⁰

Beyond the figures of Moses and Elijah, Church authorities also linked fasting to the Old Testament more generally. In his 1834 Pastoral letter entitled *Del digiuno e della Quaresima* (On the Fast and On Lent), Giuseppe Righetti included an expanded list of virtuous Old Testament models of fasting:

Moses and Elijah prepared themselves with a forty-day fast to the receptions with God; after a three-week fast God revealed to Daniel the most profound mysteries: Samson and Samuel were the fruit of their mothers’ prayers accompanied by fasting: Sarah, Judith, and Esther owed their great power in prayer to fasting; and in all centuries every servant of God has believed in not being better able to offer their prayers to God if not accompanied by fasting.⁶¹

⁶⁰ “Il Santo Legislatore Mosè, che aveva prodigiosamente salvato dalla servitù dell’Egitto il popolo Israelita, digiunando e pregando per quaranta giorni meritò ricevere sul Sinai dalle mani del Signore la legge dell’antica alleanza; e per quaranta giorni aveva pure digiunato e pregato il Profeta Elia allorchè vide, per quanto è possibile ad uomo qui in terra, la gloria del Signore; e nella pienezza de’ tempi il Figlio stesso di Dio, il nostro Salvatore Gesù Cristo volle anch’ egli per quaranta giorni digiunare e pregare nel deserto prima di annunziare al popolo d’Israele la nuova legge di grazia.” Pedicini, *Modo pratico di santificare la Quaresima*, 3.

⁶¹ “Mosè ed Elia si prepararono col digiuno di quaranta giorni ai trattenimenti con Dio: dopo un digiuno di tre settimane Dio rivelò a Daniele i più profondi misteri: Sansone e Samuele furono il frutto delle orazioni accompagnate dal digiuno delle loro madri: Sara, Giuditta, ed Ester dovettero al digiuno loro la forza grande nelle orazioni: ed in tutti i secoli ogni servo di Dio ha creduto di non poter meglio offrir a Dio le sue preghiere se non accompagnate dal digiuno.” Righetti, *Del digiuno e della quaresima*, 92-93n2.

It is significant that instances of typological comparison appear in pastoral letters like those by Righetti, who wrote with the intent “to justify the fast and Lenten abstinence against false imputations, and to instruct the faithful in various questions regarding the fast” (as the subtitle of Righetti’s publication reads). Thus, typology was not an esoteric principle of hermeneutics known only to the clergy. On the contrary, typological comparisons were made visible precisely to be used as a practical didactic tool for enforcing the Lenten fast among the masses. In other words, telling typological stories about the Old Testament “framed” the fast and “ritualized” it—that is, legitimized it by invoking the credentials of its ancient practitioners.⁶² From this high ecclesiastical perspective, to observe the Lenten fast was to participate vicariously in a living typological performance of Old Testament spiritual practices.

Old Testament characters figured prominently in typological justifications of Lenten fasting; Old Testament characters also appeared onstage in front of theater audiences who were expected to observe the Lenten fast. At an initial abstract level, I would account for these conspicuous parallels by suggesting the broad existence of a cultural “typological imaginary” of Old Testament characters in the nineteenth century (to be further discussed in [Chapter 3](#)).⁶³ Yet accounting for these parallels in more concrete terms will require a degree of delicacy. If it would be narrow to interpret these Lenten ecclesiastical and theatrical discourses as completely insular, equally narrow would be expecting a direct correlation between how the two represented Old Testament characters. Certainly the theaters were not thinly veiled “pulpits” for delivering

⁶² My reference to ritualization at this point draws on cultural anthropological literature on the term, as explained in [Chapter 1](#). See Stewart and Strathern, *Ritual*, 1-2.

⁶³ I have borrowed this phrase from Kathleen Biddick, who explores typology as a structural conceptual tool that Christian communities have historically used to distance themselves from the practices and values of Judaism. Kathleen Biddick, *The Typological Imaginary: Circumcision, Technology, History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

typological Lenten sermons, nor were theater patrons approaching them directly as such. Instead, any ecclesiastical echoes that resonated in theatrical representations of Old Testament characters would necessarily have been couched within the conventional musical-dramatic rhetoric of the theater.

In [Chapter 3](#) I will begin to suggest some ways in which the ecclesiastical echoes of typological comparison echoed through the reception histories of Rossini's *Mosè* and Donizetti's *Il diluvio*. But before doing so, I will conclude this chapter by considering the ecclesiastical rhetoric surrounding Old Testament typology from one last perspective that will be shown to resonate poignantly with sacred-dramatic representations of the Old Testament. The rhetorical point under consideration investigated is that of “sublimation” (or “elevation”), and I will be taking an inductive historical approach to consider how this concept related to the ecclesiastical typological imaginary of the Old Testament. It is only by coincidence that this typological elevation that I am exploring bears the same name as the theoretical psychoanalytical principle of sublimation, in which sexual libido is suppressed and channeled into more socially acceptable forms of creative energy.⁶⁴ One might perhaps employ a loose psychoanalytical metaphor of “sublimating” carnivalesque desire into Lenten devotion, but I will not be pursuing this anachronistic analogy further at present; to do so would obscure the typological associations of “sublimation” that were already present in the early nineteenth century. Specifically, I am suggesting that “sublimation” represents a terminologically descriptive way of referring to typological fulfillment. The English “sublimation” is etymologically related to the Italian verb

⁶⁴ As a psychoanalytical principle, sublimation is perhaps most commonly associated with the work of Freud and Lacan. For a recent musicological application of this concept for understanding the erotic in melodrama, see Fabio Rossi, ed., *Sublimazione e concretezza dell'eros nel melodrama: Rilievi linguistici, letterari, sessuologici e musicologici* (Rome: Bonacci editore, 2007).

sublimare, which is listed in an 1823 Italian dictionary as synonymous with “to make sublime” (*far sublime*), “to raise” (*innalzare*), and “to enlarge” (*aggrandire*).⁶⁵ In this regard the word “sublimation” itself bears typological overtones: “to raise” and “to make sublime” are closely related to the concept of typological completion or fulfillment.

A reconstructed set of historical cross-references further suggests that the verb *sublimare* was seen as particularly relevant to the concept of Old Testament typology. In the 1823 dictionary entry on *sublimare* cited above, the list of historical usages of the verb includes a reference to Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, a classic Italian literary account of metaphysical Easter-weekend elevation. The verse cited in the dictionary entry comes from Canto XXII of Dante’s *Paradiso*: “And I am he who first bore up there his name, who brought to earth that truth which doth lift us so high”⁶⁶ (Ed io son quel che su vi portai prima / Lo nome di Colui che ’n terra addusse / La verità, che tanto ci sublima).⁶⁷ Dante’s epic poem was alive and well on the Italian peninsula in the early nineteenth century, as evidenced by a new commentated edition of the work printed in Padua in 1816, and the commentary on this particular tercet illuminates the spiritual overtones of sublimation at that time. In his commentary, Baldassarre Lombardi cursorily identifies the speaker of this tercet as St. Benedict and “[the one] who brought to earth th[e] truth” as Christ; Lombardi’s

⁶⁵ This entry on *sublimare* also includes a chemical definition of the term meaning “that operation, by means of which fire is used to volatilize a solid substance” (“quell’operazione, per mezzo della quale a forza del fuoco si fa volatilizzare una sostanza solida”). *Dizionario della lingua italiana, tomo quinto*, s.v. “sublimare” (Bologna: Per le stampe de’ fratelli Masi, e comp., 1823), 578, https://books.google.com/books?id=D_dGAQAAMAAJ.

⁶⁶ The English translation of this tercet comes from Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Carlyle, Okey, and Wicksteed (New York: Vintage Books, 1950), 539.

⁶⁷ Dante Alighieri, *La divina commedia, corretta spiegata e difesa dal P. Baldassarre Lombardi M.C. . . . TOM. III, Paradiso* (Rome: Stamperia de Romanis, 1816 [1791]), 344, <https://books.google.com/books?id=w-CYZVS5V68C>.

subsequent explanation of the “truth” that “lifts high” (*sublima*, from *sublimare*) suggests a link between sublimation and typological comparison:

Truth here cannot be interpreted as opposed to error, since in this sense there was also the truth in the Old Testament, before the incarnation of the divine Word; on the contrary, [the intended opposition is of] figure and shadow. Hence to the particular subject of the figure of the most holy Eucharist, which in the Old Testament was the eating of the Paschal lamb, the Church sings with St. Thomas [Aquinas]: *Shadows flee from truth*.⁶⁸

Lombardi summarizes his typological argument with a telling interpretation of Dante’s use of the verb *sublimare* in the phrase “che tanto ci sublima”: “che rende noi tanto nobili sopra quelli dell’antico Testamento” (“that renders us so noble above those of the Old Testament”).⁶⁹ The important point here is how the verb *sublimare* elicits from Lombardi a typological comparison of events from the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. In this ecclesiastical sense, sublimation entailed a noble typological elevation above the Old Testament’s “shadows.”

At first glance, Lombardi’s overtly theological approach to Old Testament typology might seem unhelpful for approaching a critical understanding of Old Testament characters in Lenten sacred drama. To borrow a metaphor from Plato, might a typological reading of Lenten sacred dramas like *Mosè* or *Il diluvio* reduce them to “shadow-puppet theater” projected on the back wall of a cave, perhaps by the New-Testament-centric “figure” of Holy Week liturgy?⁷⁰ Metaphysical shadows may perhaps flee from figures of truth, as Thomas Aquinas had argued five hundred years before Lombardi. Yet a figure close to a flame can cast shadows larger and more imposing than

⁶⁸ “*Verità* non si può quì intendere detta contrariamente ad errore, poichè in questo senso vi era la verità anche nel vecchio Testamento, prima dell’incarnazione del divin Verbo; ma contrariamente a figura ed ombra. Onde al particolare proposito di quella figura della santissima Eucaristia, che era nel vecchio Testamento il mangiar dell’agnello Pasquale, *Umbram fugat veritas*, canta la Chiesa con san Tommaso.” Ibid., 344-45.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 345.

⁷⁰ Plato expositis his allegory of the cave in Book VII of *The Republic*.

the figure itself. As Neapolitans approached the dawn of Resurrection Sunday, the sublime shadow of the Old Testament grew ever larger in Naples' theaters and in the Neapolitan typological imagination.

3.0 TYPECASTING THE OLD TESTAMENT: TRAGIC-SUBLIME CHARACTERS IN TRAGIC-SACRED DRAMA

Thus too the lawgiver of the Jews, no common man, when he had duly conceived the power of the Deity, showed it forth as duly. At the very beginning of his Laws, “God said,” he writes—What? “Let there be light, and there was light, let there be earth, and there was earth.”⁷¹

—Longinus, *On the Sublime* (1st Century A.D.)

“Perhaps the musical sublime exists only in the mind of the beholder.”⁷² With these words musicologist Wye Allanbrook wistfully concluded her 2010 survey of musicological literature on the musical sublime. Concerned by Romantic scholarly yearnings to link Kant’s epistemology of the sublime with musical stylistic topoi, Allanbrook sought to place the musical sublime behind a thick pane of New Historical glass and thereby relegate it to “the mind of the beholder.” But who is the beholder of the musical sublime? Presumably not the audiences of Rossini’s or Donizetti’s sacred dramas, conventional wisdom would have it; scholars seeking to “hear” the sublime in music have only occasionally ventured beyond the Austro-Germanic music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. Yet beholding the historical diversity of those who beheld musical sublimity reveals a social paradigm of the sublime that was not confined by the Alps’ northern slopes.

In this chapter I argue that the early Neapolitan reception histories of Rossini’s *Mosè* and Donizetti’s *Il diluvio* reveal a musicalized conception of Old Testament patriarchs as tragic-

⁷¹ Longinus, *Longinus: On the Sublime*, trans. A.O. Prickard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), 18, <https://archive.org/details/cu31924014233450>.

⁷² Wye J. Allanbrook, “Is the Sublime a Musical Topos?” *Eighteenth-Century Music* 7, no. 2 (2010): 263-79, at 279.

sublime “characters.”⁷³ Overlapping senses of the word “character” figure prominently in this chapter, because Old Testament patriarchs as tragic-sublime literary “characters” (figures) were associated with a corresponding tragic-sublime “character” (style) of musical expression. Supporting this claim is an entry on “Characters” in Pietro Lichtenthal’s 1826 *Dizionario e Bibliografia della Musica* (Dictionary and Bibliography of Music), where the author describes “the tragic Character or style, which combines sadness with force and sublimity” (“il Carattere o stile tragico, il quale combina la tristezza colla forza e sublimità”).⁷⁴ By presenting a combination of journalistic, iconographic, and score-based evidence, I demonstrate how early Neapolitan audiences understood Noah and Moses in tragic-sacred dramas in terms of Lichtenthal’s tragic-sublime musical style.

Relating Old Testament characters to Lichtenthal’s tragic-sublime expressive musical character destabilizes the common association of the sublime with natural phenomena and suggests how sublimity has been expressed through social codes such as musical style. Furthermore, this tragic sublimity represents a significant advancement upon scholarship that theorizes Neapolitan sacred dramas according to the sacred/profane binary; for whereas “sacred” often connotes emotional austerity and restriction, sublimity places these works squarely within the realm of nineteenth-century emotional musical affect. By demonstrating how Old Testament characters brokered a popularized version of musical sublimity in Naples, I correct a distorted view of the role of emotion in Lenten sacred dramas and highlight the role of popular sublimity in Neapolitan constructions of sacredness. Nonetheless, the tragic-sublime character explored in this chapter is

⁷³ While the phrase “Old Testament patriarchs” most commonly denotes the figures of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in this chapter I am using the phrase more loosely to include Noah and Moses as major symbolic figures in the Old Testament.

⁷⁴ Lichtenthal, *Dizionario e Bibliografia della Musica*, vol. 1, s.v. “caratteri,” 143.

not an abstract aesthetic, but rather lies tangent to early nineteenth-century attitudes towards modern Jews and Jewish musicalities. The chapter concludes with some considerations about how the socially contingent nature of Lichtenthal's tragic-sublime aesthetic informs the increasingly politicized reception of Rossini's *Mosè* in the twenty-first century.

3.1 THE SACRED/PROFANE BINARY, LIMINALITY, AND SUBLIMITY

Before presenting the evidence to document this sublime-tragic character in Naples, I must briefly address how my study relates to those of previous scholars that have generally viewed Neapolitan sacred drama through the lens of the sacred/profane binary.⁷⁵ Given that the word “sacred” appears in the genre designations “sacred drama” (*dramma sacro*) and “tragic-sacred drama” (*azione tragico-sacra*),⁷⁶ it is perhaps unsurprising that musicologists have turned to “the sacred” and its implied binary counterpart—“profane,” or sometimes “secular”—to understand sacred drama's generic conventions. More specifically, a major theme in scholarship since the early 1990s has been locating sacred dramatic works like *Mosè* and *Il diluvio* “between the sacred and profane.” This line of inquiry has often found its impetus in an 1830 letter from Donizetti to his father, where the composer writes about wanting to “divide the genre of profane music from the sacred” in *Il*

⁷⁵ From the social-scientific approach to religion, the sacred/profane dichotomy was theorized most notably by Durkheim, who understood the prohibitions surrounding the isolation and elevation of special practices and objects (“sacred”) from other more mundane ones (“profane”). See Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman, abridged and with an introduction and notes by Mark S. Cladis, Oxford World's Classics (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001 [1912]), xxi-xxii.

⁷⁶ For a more full investigation of these terms and how they relate to oratorio as a genre, see Howard E. Smither, “Oratorio and Sacred Opera, 1700–1825: Terminology and Genre Distinction,” *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 106 (1979–1980): 88-104.

diluvio universale.⁷⁷ Using this quote as a point of departure, scholars have traced the formal stylistic and dramatic elements of these sacred dramas to either opera as a “profane” genre, or to oratorio and Church music as more “sacred” phenomena.⁷⁸ These studies on Neapolitan sacred drama thus fit into a broader emerging narrative in scholarship about the cross-hybridization of sacred and secular musical aesthetics in early nineteenth-century Italy.⁷⁹

In relating Old Testament characters to the sublime, my purpose is to reconsider the implicit functional models of sanctity that lie beneath the “between sacred and profane” strand of scholarship on sacred drama. One such model theorizes a sort of “sliding scale” with degrees of sacredness, in which “sacred” objects are more guarded than “profane” ones. This model is employed in the following overview description of Neapolitan sacred dramas:

Biblically based theater works . . . were based on Old Testament subjects, further removed in sacred character than were Evangelical [New Testament] ones, and perhaps richer with dramaturgical possibilities, admitting the addition of a love interest, without which a truly theatrical element required by the rhetoric of opera would be missing.⁸⁰

Insofar as theatrical representations of the life of Christ were subject to greater official control than those relating to the Old Testament, this summary is historically accurate. Yet it is important to

⁷⁷ “dividere il genere di musica profano dal sacro.” Quoted in Piperno, “Dividere il genere di musica profano dal sacro,” 213.

⁷⁸ Ibid. See also George W. Loomis, “Sacred or Profane?” *Opera* (United Kingdom) 56, no. 11 (2005): 1317-21.

⁷⁹ See Lucia Marchi, “Rossini’s ‘Stabat Mater’ and the Aesthetics of 19th-Century Sacred Music,” *Rivista internazionale di musica sacra, The International Church Music Review* 32, nos. 1-2 (2011): 341-61.

⁸⁰ Bruno Zanolini, “L’azione tragico-sacra in Rossini e Donizetti dal *Mosè in Egitto* al *Diluvio universale*,” in *L’Opera teatrale di Gaetano Donizetti: atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studio*, 149-69 (Bergamo: Comune di Bergamo, 1993), 167. The quoted text comes from Zanolini’s own English-language abstract of his Italian-language article.

remember that the sacred/profane binary itself is a historically conditioned tool for thought,⁸¹ and therefore any middle ground between sacred and profane is not neutral territory. Furthermore, as an essentially differential concept, the “between sacred and profane” paradigm risks concealing the positive cultural content that was ascribed to sacred dramas.

I am not suggesting that scholarship on sacred drama should abandon the sacred/profane binary as a conceptual tool—to do so would discount Donizetti’s belief that this binary was historically relevant for understanding *Il diluvio*. Rather, understanding the historical contingency of the sacred/profane binary in Naples means considering the positive content occupying the “middle ground” between sacred and profane in Naples. Here I refer provisionally to Victor Turner’s classic theory of liminality, which he describes as a “period of margin” or “interstructural situation”⁸² that mediates the “before” and “after” states of cultural initiation rites. Central to liminality is its elevated nature and its distinct attributes from the categories that surround it:

We are not dealing with structural contradictions when we discuss liminality, but with the essentially unstructured (which is at once destructured and prestructured) and often the people themselves see this in terms of bringing neophytes into close connection with deity or with superhuman power, with what is, in fact, often regarded as the unbounded, the infinite, the limitless.⁸³

It is worth noting that Turner’s description of liminality in terms of “the unbounded, the infinite, the limitless” draws on the image of the sublime as described by philosophers such as Kant. This connection finds etymological corroboration in the fact that the same Latin root *limen* (threshold) provides the basis not only for “liminality” but also for “sublimation” (described in [Chapter 2](#)) and the “sublime.” Naturally, appeals to etymology only go so far in cultural analysis—Latin, despite

⁸¹ See Kim Knott, “The Secular Sacred: In Between or Both/And?” in *Social Identities Between the Sacred and the Secular*, ed. Abby Day, Giselle Vincett, and Christopher R. Cotter, 145-60 (New York: Routledge, 2013).

⁸² Turner, “Betwixt and Between,” 93.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 98.

its centrality for the historical development of Western European languages, is not neutral in how it “divides up the world” as a linguistic system.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, a provisional understanding of sublimity as a liminal state between sacred and profane helps explain how the image of sublimity guided the cultural reception of Lenten sacred drama in Naples.

Kant’s ideas on the sublime were understood as being relevant to musical discourse in early nineteenth-century Italy. This point emerges in the 1826 *Dizionario e Bibliografia della Musica* by Pietro Lichtenthal (1780–1853), an Austrian-born physician and writer on music who had settled in Milan in 1810.⁸⁵ In his lengthy entry on “Sublime,” Lichtenthal describes the concept in terms similar to those of Kant, for whom the sublime was a force with an immensity that defied any rational attempts to comprehend it.⁸⁶ According to Lichtenthal, “given that we recognize the greatness of an object by comparing it with other objects, if then in the moment of perception a thing seems great to us apart from every comparison, then it rises above the other quantities, and for this reason it is called *sublime*.”⁸⁷ Lichtenthal continues:

It is true that the sublime in principle limits the imagination and the intellect with its immeasurable quantity, but afterwards promotes and prolongs the activity of

⁸⁴ I am referring here to a basic poststructural tenet regarding the relationship between language and knowledge. As Catherine Belsey notes, “[p]oststructuralism proposes that the distinctions we make are not necessarily given by the world around us, but are instead produced by the symbolizing systems we learn.” Catherine Belsey, *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7.

⁸⁵ Alfred Loewenberg and Bruce Carr, “Lichtenthal, Peter,” *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed May 4, 2016, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

⁸⁶ Exactly whether or how reason fails or succeeds in granting a sense of triumph over nature (the difference between the mathematical and the dynamic sublime, respectively) is a matter of debate. For a useful overview of Kant’s philosophy, see Hannah Ginsborg, “Kant’s Aesthetics and Teleology,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/kant-aesthetics/>.

⁸⁷ “Siccome però riconosciamo la grandezza d’un oggetto paragonandolo con altri oggetti, se quindi nel momento della percezione, una cosa ci sembra grande fuor d’ogni paragone, in allora s’innalza sopra tutte le altre quantità, e perciò chiamasi *sublime*.” Pietro Lichtenthal, *Dizionario e bibliografia della musica, del dottore Pietro Lichtenthal*, vol. 2 [L-Z], s.v. “sublime” (Milano: per Antonio Fontana, 1826), 223, <https://books.google.com/books?id=oofUwoHdzjgC>.

reason, augmenting the vital sense more efficaciously through it. The sublime will therefore be that which promotes the activity of reason with its unmeasured greatness, and augments its vital sense. Or, as Kant and Schiller say: the sublime consists in the infinite, which dumbfounds the senses and imagination [in attempting] to produce it and understand it, while reason believes it and affirms it.⁸⁸

As a dictionary writer, Lichtenthal likely felt compelled to begin his entry on the sublime with Kant in order to establish the historical and intellectual lineage of the concept. Nevertheless, the Kantian sublime was not the primary understanding of the word circulating in 1820s Italian musical circles,⁸⁹ nor was it the ultimate end of Lichtenthal's interest in the sublime. It seems that the concept of sublimity was too tempting for Romantic thinkers not to apply to music, even if that meant stripping it of its core Kantian properties.

For Lichtenthal, the musical sublime was not primarily a function of intellect, but rather of musical emotion. For example, Lichtenthal relates the sublime to a cloud of related words, including the beautiful (*il bello*), the grand (*il grande*), the solemn (*il solenne*), the pathetic (*il patetico*), the moving (*il commovente*), and the sentimental (*il sentimentale*), many of which he then defines in terms of emotional musical affect.⁹⁰ From a Kantian epistemological perspective, of course, comparing the sublime to a series of lower and more easily grasped emotional concepts would seem to relativize and therefore destroy the sublime as a category; for, as Lichtenthal himself pointed out, it is “apart from every comparison” that the Kantian sublime seems great to

⁸⁸ “Vero è che il sublime limita in principio la fantasia e l'intelletto colla sua quantità immisurabile, ma promuove ed allarga poi dopo l'attività della ragione, aumentandone più efficacemente il senso vitale. Il sublime sarà dunque quello che colla sua smisurata grandezza promuove l'attività della ragione, e ne aumenta il senso vitale. Ovvero, come dicono Kant e Schiller: il sublime consiste nell'infinito, che sbigottisce i sensi e la fantasia a produrlo ed a capirlo, mentre la ragione lo crea e l'afferma.” Ibid., 223.

⁸⁹ As Lawrence Kramer has noted, the idea that the Kantian sublime could be literally manifest in music was “already on its way to becoming obsolete” by the end of the eighteenth century. Lawrence Kramer, “Recalling the Sublime: The Logic of Creation in Haydn's *Creation*,” *Eighteenth-Century Music* 6, no. 1 (2009): 41-57, at 41.

⁹⁰ Lichtenthal, *Dizionario e bibliografia della musica*, vol. 2, s.v. “sublime,” 223-24.

us. Yet this apparent inconsistency is only problematic if one were seeking to “hear” the Kantian sublime within Italian music—a somewhat passé goal amidst the current scholarly skepticism surrounding the musical sublime. Rather, what interests me is Lichtenthal’s efforts to spell out the technical nature of sublime music, and then to suggest some ways that it might be evidenced in music. Thus having left us clues as to his personal mental “sound image” of musical sublimity, Lichtenthal provides a historical ground for asking what might have passed for “sublime” in 1820s Italian music. I will pursue this investigation later on in this chapter, but first I must address another concept integrally related to the sublime for Lichtenthal: “characters.”

Lichtenthal’s entry on “characters” expands the realm of possibilities for viewing the sublime as a function of musical expression. I quote the entry in its entirety:

CHARACTERS, noun, masculine, plural. Beyond the qualities that pertain to style (considered an art of writing), there are some others that, holding more closely to expression, give a general tint to a composition, and serve again to determine the styles, and these are called *Characters*.

Of these Characters, some are general, being relative 1) to our actions, 2) to the degree with which we convey them, and 3) to the thunder with which we express them. The first one gives a cheerful or sad character; the second, the vivacity or the sweetness; the third the sublimity or the simplicity. Each of these three states has an intermediate character. Combining them one will have a great number of mixed characters, the principal of which are the tragic Character style, which combines sadness with force and sublimity; the buffo, which reunites the cheerfulness with the vivacity and familiarity, and finally the semi-character, which links the medial situations. The other characters are particular: they refer to diverse circumstances, like the habits of a people, or of a class of men; and often of a lone individual. Thus we have the religious style, the military, pastoral, the chivalrous styles, etc.; the Italian style, the French, the Spanish, the Asiatic, etc. In all these circumstances the word style is evidently equivalent to that of “Character,” but in a less full sense (see STYLE).⁹¹

⁹¹ “CARATTERI, s. m. pl. Oltre le qualità che appartengono allo stile, considerate come arte di scrivere, ve ne sono delle altre le quali, tenendo più vicino all’espressione, danno alla composizione una tinta generale, e servono ancora a determinare gli stili, e queste diconsi *Caratteri*. [//] Di questi Caratteri, gli uni sono generali, essendo relativi 1) alle nostre azioni, 2) al grado con cui le risentiamo, e 3) al tuono col quale le esprimiamo. Il primo dà il Carattere gaio o triste; il secondo, la vivacità o la dolcezza; il terzo la sublimità o la semplicità. Ognuno di questi tre stati ha un carattere intermedio. Combinandoli si avrà un gran numero di Caratteri misti, i

Whether or not the sublime constituted a proper semiotic topos, it is nevertheless evident that Lichtenthal understands sublimity as an ingredient of musical character. Through Lichtenthal's dense prose, three primary points arise regarding sublimity: 1) sublimity is a function of the "thunder" with which a musical action is expressed; 2) as such, sublimity relates to simplicity as two poles of the possible "thunder" of character expression; and 3) the principle "mixed" or "intermediate" character is that of "tragedy," which "combines sadness with force and sublimity." It is this last point regarding intermediate characters that is the most interesting at present, for in what sense does "tragedy" mediate between the two seemingly opposed concepts of sublimity and sadness? Although the question is admittedly hard to answer in terms of musical style, I suggest that the solution arises from another facet of Lichtenthal's nuanced conception of "characters." While "character" may mean "disposition" or "personality," characters can equally well be literary figures or personages. Lichtenthal himself acknowledges this possibility when he refers secondarily to the musical styles of France, Italy, Spain, or Asia as "characters."⁹²

principali di cui sono il Carattere o stile tragico, il quale combina la tristezza colla forza e sublimità; il buffo, che riunisce la gajezza colla vivacità e familiarità, e finalmente il semi-carattere, il quale associa le situazioni medie. Gli altri Caratteri sono particolari: essi si riferiscono a diverse circostanze, come le abitudini d'un popolo, o d'una classe d'uomini, e sovente d'un solo individuo. Così abbiamo lo stile religioso, militare, pastorale, cavalleresco ec.; lo stile italiano, francese, spagnuolo, asiatico ec. In tutte queste circostanze la parola stile equivale evidentemente a quella di Carattere, ma in un senso men ampio (v. STILE)." Lichtenthal, *Dizionario e Bibliografia della Musica*, vol. 1, s.v. "caratteri," 143-44.

⁹² It should be noted that the English word "character" is often used to translate two distinct yet related terms in Italian. *Personaggio* refers to a specific role within an opera's dramatis personæ, while *carattere* refers to the personality, disposition, or collective expressive mannerisms—that is, "character"—associated with that dramatic role. In this sense, the "character" (*personaggio*) of Mosè as created by Rossini exhibits a sublime "character" (*carattere*). The difference between *personaggio* and *carattere* is demonstrated in Lichtenthal's entry on *sortita*, which he defines as the "action of a character that enters the scene" ("Azione d'un personaggio ch'entra sulla scena"). According to Lichtenthal, "The music of a *sortita* must have a decisive color, and grand connections with the disposition of the character that awaits it; otherwise it is a contradiction." ("La musica d'una *sortita* de[v]e avere un colore deciso, e grandi rapporti col carattere del

Lichtenthal supposes a definite link, then, between musical and literary or national character, and it is from this perspective that I suggest that Old Testament patriarchs constituted “tragic-sublime” musical-literary characters. This connection assumes an unexpected and heightened importance in regard to Neapolitan tragic-sacred dramas. If we were to use the model of ancient tragic theater, for example, where “tragic” figures are those whose fatal flaw brings about their inevitable and disastrous end, we might assume that the Hebrews’ enemies are the tragic figures in Neapolitan sacred dramas, because it is often their stubborn wickedness that brings about their downfall. However, archival evidence reveals that it was quite the other way around. In Naples, it was the Old Testament patriarchs and the Hebrews themselves who were consistently depicted as tragic characters who achieved a critical balance between simplicity and sublimity on the one hand, and sadness on the other.

3.2 OLD TESTAMENT SUBLIMITY IN NAPLES

In the pages that follow, I explore how Lichtenthal’s description of the tragic-sublime musical “character” informs the popular Neapolitan perception of two particular Old Testament characters who were represented on the sacred-dramatic stage. The characters in question are Moses (Mosè) and Noah (Noè) as the respective protagonists of Rossini’s *Mosè* and Donizetti’s *Il diluvio*. Both of these tragic-sacred dramas are stories about deliverance. In *Mosè*, the titular character prays for deliverance from the Egyptians who have trapped the Hebrews against the Red Sea; in *Il diluvio*, Noè prays for deliverance from those seeking to kill him for having prophesied a flood as a divine

personaggio che s’attende; altrimenti è un contr[o]senso.”) Lichtenthal, *Dizionario e bibliografia della musica*, vol. 2, s.v. “sortita,” 211.

punishment for their wickedness. I refer to Moses and Noah (or “Mosè” and “Noè,” as they are called in the operas) loosely as “Old Testament patriarchs,” by which I simply mean to highlight how they have been traditionally viewed as “foundational” figures in historical Christian typological readings of the Old Testament (as described in [Chapter 2](#)).⁹³

The tragic-sublime image of Noè and Mosè as sacred-dramatic characters was part of a broader pattern of thinking in Naples that associated the Old Testament with sublimity. My first piece of evidence comes from what is perhaps an unlikely source: a ten-page persuasive manifesto entitled “*Estetica musicale e proposta di miglioramento del teatro melodrammatico*” (“Musical Aesthetic and Proposal for Improving Melodramatic Theater”), likely written in the 1830s by Nicola Longo to the Royal Superintendent of Theaters and Shows.⁹⁴ Longo’s purpose in writing is to convince the Superintendent that modern musical aesthetics would be well-suited by a new acoustical stage configuration at the San Carlo, a claim that he supports by constructing a lengthy and eloquent narrative of musical history from antiquity up through the modern time. While Longo’s reference linking the Old Testament to the sublime is both brief and rhetorical, it is precisely this brevity that renders his statement so insightful: because such an eloquent writer

⁹³ Again, the phrase “Old Testament patriarchs” is sometimes used specifically to designate Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as the founding “patriarchs” of the Old Testament Hebrews. In this technical sense of the phrase, neither Noah nor Moses would be considered as “patriarchs”; according to the Old Testament narrative, Noah predates the patriarchs, while Moses postdates them.

⁹⁴ Nicola Longo to the Royal Superintendent of Theaters and Shows, *Musical Aesthetic and Proposal for Improving Melodramatic Theater*, n.d. Soprintendenza dei teatri e spettacoli, container 20, State Archive, Naples. The document was located in a sub-folder labeled “1820” as of February 2017, although this placement is unlikely to reflect accurately the date of composition. One reference within the document to “Norma”—if the author is referencing the opera by Bellini—would date the document after 1831. For further information on Nicola Longo (1789–1877, a doctor and Italian patriot), see Francesco Antonio Schiraldi, “Vita e attività dell’illustre Dottor Nicola Longo di Modugno in Terra di Bari, medico e patriota,” *Collegium Historicorum Chirurgiae*, <http://www.collegiostoricidellachirurgia.it/documenti/contributi/NICOLA%20LONGO.pdf> (accessed March 14, 2017).

would hardly risk weakening his central argument with a contestable subsidiary claim, it follows logically that Longo views the link between sublimity and the Old Testament as a common-sense viewpoint shared by his reader. According to Longo:

As regards the nature of their inspiration [of the ancients] and of their sound, it is all unknown to us. Only among the Hebrews can we presuppose that music had more spiritual inspiration, seeing as how in the Babylonian captivity the daughters of Zion deplored through song their homeland, the exile, misfortune, as is revealed in the Psalm—“By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.” Longinus declared it a masterpiece of pathetic poetry, one that all our poets and poetesses wearied themselves to put into verse without ever being able to go so far [as to] translate.⁹⁵

As key concepts that Longo associates with the Hebrews and Psalm 137 in this passage, spiritual inspiration and tragic pathos all fall within the realm of the sublime. Although Longo does not articulate the exact relationship that links these concepts, it is illuminating that Lichtenthal includes a description of “the pathetic” within his entry on the sublime: “The *pathetic* is really everything that agitates the strongest and most noble affects. Under this relationship the sublime and its affinities all take a pathetic character.”⁹⁶ Furthermore, that Longo understands inspiration and pathos as linked to the sublime is evidenced by his learned allusion to Longinus’s treatise *On the Sublime* (quoted at the start of this chapter).

⁹⁵ “In quanto poi alla natura delle loro ispirazioni e de loro suoni, tutto è per noi ignorato. Solo presso gli Ebrei possiam congetturare che la musica avesse ispirazioni più spirituali, poiché nella cattività di Babilonia le figlie di Sionne deploravano col canto, la patria, l’esilio, la sventura, come si rileva dal Salmo—“Super flumina Babylonii illic seimes et fleminu: cum recordaremur Sion”—Capolavoro dichiarato da Longino di poesia patetica, che tutti i nostri poeti e poetesse si sono affaticate a verseggiare senza poter mai giungere a tradurre.” Nicola Longo to the Royal Superintendent of Theaters and Shows, 2r.

⁹⁶ “Il *patetico* è propriamente tutto ciò che eccita gli affetti più forti e più nobili. Sotto questo rapporto il sublime e le sue affinità prendono tutti un carattere patetico.” Lichtenthal, *Dizionario e bibliografia della musica*, vol. 2, s.v. “sublime,” 224. In Lichtenthal’s thinking, the word “pathetic” does not necessarily bear the same pejorative overtones that it often does in modern English.

Longo's pathetic-sublime image of Old Testament Hebrews resonates with contemporary journalistic reviews of sacred dramas featuring Old Testament characters in general, and Old Testament Hebrew specifically.⁹⁷ Rossini's *Mosè* fits both categories, and the work was reviewed as follows on 14 March 1818 in the *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie* (Journal of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies):

While interpreting and cementing in Rome our reflections on *Boadicea*, Rossini was obtaining new triumphs in Naples with his *Mosè in Egitto*. Simple and natural singing, always animated by true expression and the most graceful melody; the greatest effects of harmony, used soberly in the terrible and the pathetic; a rapid recitative, noble and expressive; choruses, duets, trios, quartets, etc. equally expressive, touching, declaimed; here are the merits of this new music, in which the composer raised himself to the sublimity of his subject, for which he is extremely in debt to the poet.⁹⁸

Coming eight years before Lichtenthal published his music dictionary, this review exemplifies Lichtenthal's paradigm of "tragedy" as an intermediate character state between sadness and sublimity. "Simple," "natural," and "sober" on the one hand, and "terrible" and "sublime" on the other, *Mosè* balances out in the intermediate zone of the "pathetic" or tragic. Furthermore, the review reinforces Lichtenthal's dual sense of "character" as "personality" and "personage," given

⁹⁷ It might be rightly observed that the noun "sublimity" in these journal reviews was being used in a colloquial sense without direct reference to theoretical discourse on the musical sublime. Nonetheless, given the consistency with which "sublimity" and related terms were used to describe the Old Testament in these reviews, the "sublime" descriptions can hardly be purely coincidental. Rather, this consistency suggests the extent to which the image of Old Testament patriarchs as sublime characters had permeated the imaginations of the reviewers.

⁹⁸ "Mentre interpretavansi e cementavansi in Roma le nostre riflessioni sulla *Boadicea*, Rossini otteneva in Napoli nuovi trionfi col suo *Mosè in Egitto*. Un canto semplice, naturale, sempre animato da espressione [sic] vera e da gratissima melodia; i più grandi effetti dell'armonia sobriamente adoperati nel terribile e nel patetico; un recitativo rapido, nobile, espressivo; cori, duetti, terzetti, quartetti ec. egualmente espressivi, toccanti, declamati; ecco i pregi di questa nuova musica, in cui il compositore si è innalzato alla sublimità del suo argomento, per il quale egli è sommamente debitore al poeta." "REAL TEATRO DI S. CARLO: *Mosè in Egitto*," *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, no. 62, 14 March 1818, p. 247, Neapolitan Section, National Library of Naples.

that the author speaks of sublimity in reference to both Rossini's musical style and to the Old Testament as the opera's subject.⁹⁹

Similarly "sublime" rhetoric appears in two subsequent reviews of *Mosè*. Here is a review of *Mosè* from 8 March 1819, printed in the same journal:

We will speak about this grand [*grande*], moving [*commovente*], and melodious music after the second performance, hoping then to be able to better hear performed the difficult parts of *Mosè* and of *Faraone*. In the meantime, we congratulate the imaginative Rossini for the new and original beauty, of which he has enriched this work of his; and above all for the religious song, pathetic [*patetico*] and sublime, with which the Hebrew People, pursued by Pharaoh, beg for help from the God of their fathers; and full of hope and faith they prepare themselves to pass through the waves of the divided Eritrean [Red] Sea.¹⁰⁰

This reviewer uses multiple words that Lichtenthal would later use to describe the sublime in music: not only is the music in general considered "grand" (*grande*) and "moving" (*commovente*), but more specifically the "pathetic and sublime" nature of the opera's newly added prayer ("Dal tuo stellato soglio") place both the musical and literary characters of *Mosè* in the tragic liminal zone of pathetic sublimity. Similar rhetoric appears in a review of *Mosè* from one year later, on 17 February 1820: "After a short break, this theater [the San Carlo] will open on Sunday with *Mosè in Egitto*. The choice is worthy of praise. *Mosè* is the best opera by Rossini. [. . .] One can overlook

⁹⁹ As one reads, it may be difficult to distinguish the reviewer's enthusiasm for Rossini from that of his Old Testament subject. The article's laudatory tone is especially notable in the author's italicized description of the composer as "*one of the greatest living composers, and one of the greatest geniuses of those that could show the Italian stage today*" ("*uno de' maggiori compositori viventi, ed uno de' maggiori ingegni de' quali possa oggi far mostra la scena italiana*"). Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ "Di questa musica, grande, commovente, melodiosa, parleremo dopo la seconda rappresentazione, sperando di potere allora sentir meglio eseguite le difficili parti di *Mosè* e di *Faraone*. Ci congratuliamo intanto coll'immaginoso Rossini per le nuove bellezze originali, di cui ha arrecchito [sic] questo suo lavoro, e soprattutto per il cantico religioso, patetico, sublime, col quale il Popolo Ebreo, incalzato da Faraone, implora l'aiuto del Dio dei padri suoi, e pieno di speranza e di fede si accinge a passare le onde del diviso Eritreo." "*Real Teatro di S. Carlo: Mosè in Egitto*, musica del maestro Rossini," *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, no. 50, 8 March 1819, p. 223, Neapolitan Section, National Library of Naples.

its stylistic defects, thanks to such beauty that stands out in a majestic, sublime, and pathetic composition.”¹⁰¹ The review’s use of the words “majestic,” “sublime,” and “pathetic” all resonate with Lichenthal’s rhetoric of sublimity.

While the sublime rhetoric of these reviews is tied to Old Testament Hebrews specifically, this rhetoric was also used to describe the figure of Noah, a non-Hebrew character who nonetheless represents an intermediate generation between Adam and Eve and Abraham before the nation of Israel was founded. Donizetti’s *Il diluvio* was reviewed as follows on 13 March 1830 in the *Giornale del regno delle Due Sicilie*:

Always equal to himself, Signor Lablache as Noah recalled to our mind the immortal De-Marini when he was playing the role of Jacob. That mixture of simplicity and greatness that formed the character of the Patriarchs is seen carved on his brow. That gravity of the manners, that air of inspiration when he throws himself into the tremendous future: they depict marvelously all the majesty of that second father of the human species.¹⁰²

Noah’s balance between “simplicity and greatness” recalls Lichenthal’s pairing of simplicity and sublimity as the character-range of expressing the tone of a musical action.

Beyond journalistic reviews, iconographic evidence further suggests the tragic sublimity of Old Testament patriarchs. Consider the visual representation of Moses on the title page of a

¹⁰¹ “Dopo breve riposo, questo teatro si aprirà domenica col *Mosè in Egitto*. La scelta è degna di lode. Il *Mosè* è l’opera maggiore di Rossini. Nulla rileva che talvolta lussoreggi di ornamenti come le altre sue sorelle. Si possono condonare i difetti dello stile, in grazia di tante bellezze che spiccano in una composizione maestosa, sublime, patetica. Non intendiamo con ciò fare l’apologia di Rossini. Chi più di noi rimproverò al compositore pesarese gli abusi d’ingegno?” “REAL TEATRO DIS. CARLO,” *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, no. 41, 17 February 1820, p. 172, Neapolitan Section, National Library of Naples.

¹⁰² “Sempre eguale a se stesso il sig. Lablache ci richiamò col personaggio di Noè alla memoria l’immortal De-Marini quando rappresentava Giacobbe. Quel misto di semplicità e grandezza, che formava il carattere de’ Patriarchi, si vede scolpito sulla sua fronte. Quella gravità de’ maniere, quell’aria d’ispirazione quando lanciarsi nel tremendo avvenire ritraggono a meraviglia tutta la maestà di quel secondo padre della specie umana.” “NOTIZIE INTERNE,” *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, no. 59, 13 March 1830, p. 234-35, Neapolitan Section, National Library of Naples.

vocal score of *Mosè*, most likely published in the first half of the nineteenth century (see [Figure 1](#)).

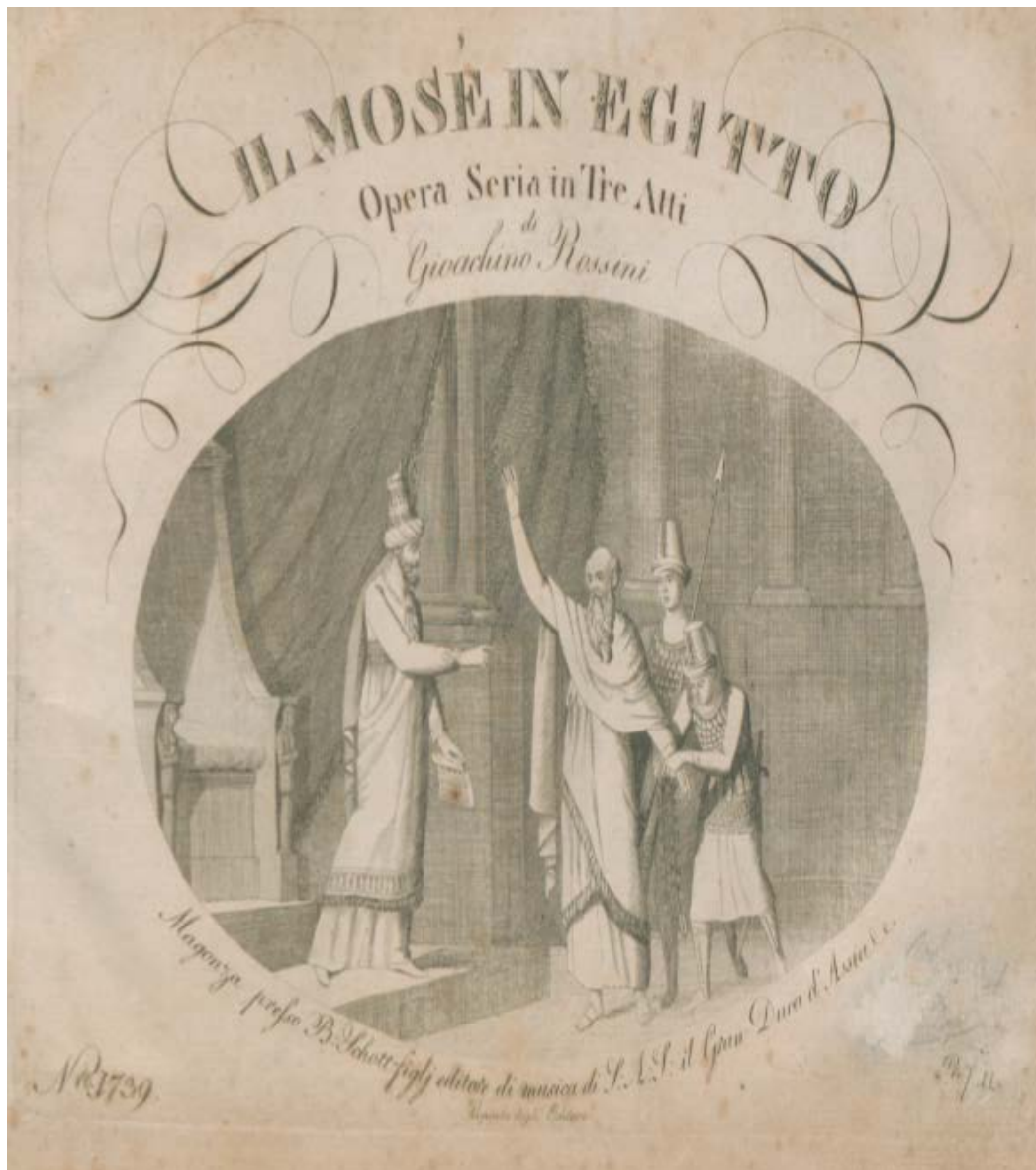


Figure 1. Moses before Pharaoh. Title page of Rossini, *Mosè in Egitto*.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Reproduced from the title page of Gioachino Rossini, *Il Mosè in Egitto: Opera seria in tre atti di Gioachino Rossini* (Mainz: B. Schott, n.d. [ca. 1820]), http://ks.imslp.net/files/imglnks/usimg/1/19/IMSLP107860-PMLP177805-Rossini_-_Mos___in_Egitto___vs_Schott_.pdf.

In this image, Pharaoh steps down from his throne and points an accusing finger at Moses; restrained by two guards, Moses raises his hand towards heaven. The depiction of Moses reinforces his image as a “simple” and “noble” figure: his only ornamentation is the fringe of his shawl and his long beard, a symbol of his wisdom and authority. This image is consistent with another depiction of Moses in a booklet of watercolor sketches by Filippo del Buono depicting the costumes for a performance of *Mosè* (perhaps from the 1840s).¹⁰⁴ The booklet contains a series of fourteen sketches of costumes for both Egyptian and Hebrew characters. Even a brief scan of the sketches suggests that *Mosè* was conceived of differently from the other characters. All of the other characters’ costumes exhibit some degree of intricacy: Hebrew and Egyptian characters alike often wear jewelry or have ornate stitching designs on the hems of garments. Amongst the Hebrews, the most richly decorated character is Aronne, who wears ornate and bejewelled liturgical vestments (described in the Bible later in Exodus 28). Yet compared to every other character in the sketchbook, *Mosè* is strikingly minimalistic. He wears an ankle-length, long-sleeved periwinkle tunic; a long, dark-brown cloak is draped over his left shoulder and tied behind his right hip. He wears brown sandals and holds a staff in his left hand; with his right index finger, he simply points heavenward. *Mosè*’s overall appearance is simple yet striking: the contrast of light blue with brown is bold yet simple. The simplicity of his costume is striking, precisely because it is significantly less embroidered than those of the other characters. To echo Lichtenthal’s description of the pathetic, *Mosè* is decidedly less festive than any other character, a

¹⁰⁴ The sketches are bound in a fragile booklet housed at the library of Naples’s Conservatory (San Pietro a Majella). The booklet is indexed in the following source: Francesco Melisi and the Conservatorio di Musica “S. Pietro a Majella di Napoli”—Biblioteca, *Catalogo dei Figurini Teatrali dell’Ottocento* (Napoli: D’Innocenzio, 2010), p. 70, no. 289. Library catalog number: c. 19(3).

quality that confers upon him a *pathos* that “excites the strongest and most noble affects.” In his pathetic simplicity, Mosè is a tragically sublime character.

Thus we return to the dual meanings of Lichtenthal’s “characters”—literary characters have appropriate musical characters. As tragically sublime characters, then, what were Mosè’s and Noè’s musical characters like? I tread lightly here upon ground that others have trodden before. Franco Piperno, for one, has noted in passing that Mosè’s vocal style is less ornate than those of other characters.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, Lucia Marchi has cited the stripped-down musical style of “Dal tuo stellato soglio” as evidence for her theory of a “secular aesthetics of sacred” that governed sacred music in the early nineteenth century.¹⁰⁶ Yet to my knowledge no one has yet directly connected Mosè’s style to the sublime as a musical character directly tied to the literary character of Old Testament patriarchs. What might it mean, then, to think of Mosè’s and Noè’s styles not as bridging the sacred and secular, but rather as liminally tragic, spanning the sad and the sublime?

Before answering this question through musical readings of Mosè’s and Noè’s prayers for deliverance in their respective sacred dramas, it is useful to consider Lichtenthal’s description of what the sublime sounds like in music, taken from the conclusion to his entry on “Sublime”:

The composer who wants to express the character of the sublime needs a melody of few figures and few embellishments; it presents itself with bold and

¹⁰⁵ Franco Piperno’s comments relate to the perceived “conflicted relationship between the evident dramatic centrality of [Mosè] and the apparent marginality of his musical endowment, in terms of being a vocal protagonist (many accompanied recitatives, *ensembles* with or without chorus but few and modest soloistic productions...” (“...come conflittuale la relazione fra l’evidente centralità drammatica del personaggio e l’apparente marginalità della sua dotazione musicale, in termini di protagonismo vocale (molti recitativi accompagnati, *ensembles* con o senza coro ma poche e modeste sortite solistiche)...”) Franco Piperno, “‘Effetto Mosè’: fortuna e recezione del *Mosè in Egitto* a Napoli e in Italia (1818–1830),” *Atti dei convegni Lincei* 110 (1994): 165–94, at 169. Elsewhere, Piperno has compared the melodic contour of “Dal tuo stellato soglio” with that of a later nineteenth-century liturgical song used in a Jewish synagogue; however, he does not address the two in terms of the rhetoric of sublimity. See Piperno, “Il *Mosè in Egitto* e la tradizione napoletana di opere bibliche,” 263–64.

¹⁰⁶ Marchi, “Rossini’s ‘Stabat Mater’ and the Aesthetics of 19th-Century Sacred Music.”

solid steps, and often also in large intervallic leaps; he uses very energetic harmonies, once in a while mixed with bitter dissonances, a steady movement, etc.

The execution of the sublime requires a very marked and sustained sound, a sensible grammatical accent, and energetic accented oration; the Notes are more staccato than legato, but in a sustained and vigorous manner.¹⁰⁷

Lichtenthal's description of musical sublimity generally coincides with the musical style of "Dal tuo stellato soglio," the prayer chorus in Act III of *Mosè* where the Hebrews pray for deliverance before crossing the Red Sea. Lichtenthal says that a sublime melody "should present itself with bold and solid steps, and often also in large intervallic leaps." Although the single ascending perfect fourth at the start of the melody does not exactly constitute a "large intervallic leap," the melodic contour that ascends and descends stepwise between G3 and D4 can easily be heard as "bold and solid steps" (see [Figure 2](#)). Lichtenthal also asserts that a sublime melody should have "few figures and few embellishments." Rossini's melody also matches this description; only at the end of each musical phrase (every four bars), Rossini has "written in" ornaments that circle around the penultimate note of each phrase (in measure 10, the inverted turn circling G3 that resolves down to F-sharp; in measure 14, the inverted turn with the additional skip up to E-flat). The double-dotted rhythmic figures in *Mosè*'s melody also exemplify Lichtenthal's description of a "very marked and sustained sound, a sensible grammatical accent, and energetic accented oration." Furthermore, a "steady movement" is achieved by the orchestral accompaniment, with its simple sextuplet figures that arpeggiate the underlying harmonies.

¹⁰⁷ "Il Compositore il quale vuol esprimere il carattere del sublime si serve d'una melodia di poche figure e di pochi abbellimenti; s'inoltra con passi arditi, sodi, e sovente anche in larghi salti d'Intervalli; adopera armonie molto energiche, miste di quando in quando di aspre dissonanze, un movimento posato ec. [/] L'esecuzione del sublime richiede un suono ben marcato e sostenuto, un sensibile accento grammaticale, ed energico accento oratorio; le Note si fanno più staccate che legate, ma in modo sostenuto e vigoroso." Lichtenthal, *Dizionario e bibliografia della musica*, vol. 2, s.v. "sublime," 224.

Andantino. Mosè.

Dal tuo stel-la - to so - glio, Si - gnor ti vol - gi a

noi: pie - tà defi - gli tuo - i! del po - pol tuo pie - tà!

Figure 2. Rossini, *Mosè in Egitto*. Act III: “Dal tuo stellato soglio,” first strophe.¹⁰⁸

The start of the chorus considered thus far does not exhibit the “very energetic harmonies” that Lichtenthal suggests characterize the sublime style: the first several strophes of the chorus mostly alternate between the tonic and dominant chords in G minor or in the relative-major key of B-flat. Nevertheless, the surprise and jarring modulation from B-flat major to G major (rather than to the expected G minor) near the end of the chorus could well be described as an “exciting harmoni[c]” shift (see [Figure 3](#)).

¹⁰⁸ Reproduced from Rossini, *Il Mosè in Egitto: Opera seria in tre atti di Gioachino Rossini*, 200-201.

Elcia, Amenofi,
and Chorus

Soloists

Il no - stro cor che pa - ve deh tu con - for - ta ap - pien, ap -

Aroume, Mosè,
and Chorus

Chorus

pien! ap - pien! Dal tuo stel - la - to so - glio, Si - gnor ti vol - gi a no - it!

Anticipated Modulation to G Minor

Realized New Key: G Major

Figure 3. Rossini, *Mosè in Egitto*. Act III: “Dal tuo stellato soglio,” surprise modulation.¹⁰⁹

The sublime musical style present in “Dal tuo stellato soglio” is also heard in a parallel dramatic moment in Donizetti’s *Il diluvio*.¹¹⁰ At the end of Act II, Noè and his family have been sentenced to death by a pagan ruler who despises Noè for having called him to repentance in light of the prophesied flood. Kneeling, Noè cries out to his God: “Tremendous God, Almighty God, /

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 203-204.

¹¹⁰ Piperno has also compared “Dal tuo stellato soglio” with “Dio tremendo,” although not in the rhetorical terms of sublimity; see Piperno, “Dividere il genere di musica profano dal sacro,” 216-18.

Sovereign author of creation, / Do not destroy in this way / The choice work your hand has created!
 / Ah, enlighten idolatry, and pardon the blind mind!”¹¹¹ (see [Figure 4](#)).

The image shows a musical score for a vocal part and piano accompaniment. The score is in 3/4 time and features a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "Dio tremendo onnipotente del creatore autore sovrano l'opera eccelsa di tua mano non distruggere non distruggere così!". The score includes dynamic markings such as *p* and *fp*, and includes a trill in the vocal line. The piano part features a triplet in the right hand and a triplet in the left hand.

Figure 4. Donizetti, *Il diluvio universale*. Act II Finale: “Dio tremendo.”¹¹²

¹¹¹ “Dio tremendo, onnipotente, / del creato autor sovrano / L’opra eccelsa di tua mano / Non distruggere così! / La idolatra, e cieca mente, / Deh tu illumina, perdona!” Throughout this dissertation, quotations from and English translations of the libretto of *Il diluvio* have been taken from the liner notes of the following CD: Gaetano Donizetti, *Il diluvio universale*, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Giuliano Carella, with Mirco Palazzi, Majella Cullagh, Colin Lee, and Manuela Custer, ©2006 Opera Rara, in association with Peter Moores Foundation, ORC31 (2 compact discs). This libretto corresponds to a revised version of *Il diluvio* that Donizetti produced for Genoa in 1834. The lines of text quoted above are found on page 127.

¹¹² Reproduced from Gaetano Donizetti, *Il diluvio universale: Opéra in tre atti, musica di G. Donizetti* (Paris: Schonenberger, 1855), 187-88, http://ks.imslp.net/files/imgl/nks/using/f/fc/IMSLP412547-PMLP235727-Donizetti_-_Il_diluvio_universale__vs_Schonenberger_.pdf.

At the start of the first phrase (see [Figure 4](#)), Noè's melody rises and falls with stepwise motion and so exemplifies the "bold and solid" steps that Lichenthal says are characteristic of a sublime melody. The melody has relatively "few embellishments" and ornamental figures, most of which occur at cadences. Furthermore, the dotted rhythmic figures in "Dio tremendo" create "a very marked and sustained sound," while the triplet arpeggios in the accompaniment maintain "a steady movement."

As the foregoing musical descriptions suggest, both Rossini's "Dal tuo stellato soglio" and Donizetti's "Dio tremendo" exhibit musical features that align with Lichtenthal's writing on the musical style of the sublime. In conjunction with the previously documented tragic-sublime cultural image of Old Testament figures in Naples, these data points help triangulate a "musical imaginary" of tragic-sublime Old Testament prayer in Naples. Yet to revisit Wye Allanbrook's titular question once again, "is the sublime a musical topos?" I hesitate to answer in the affirmative, for two reasons. First, substantiating such a technical semiotic claim would require more evidence than the two musical examples described above. Second, even if more examples were presented to justify referring to a tragic-sublime musical topos, I am not convinced that affixing the label of "topos" to this style would further the types of social-critical aims that musicologists have increasingly embraced over the past quarter-century. Musical topics are not simply abstract musical-semiotic codes; they are also socially encoded in ways that can mask their role in the politics of representation. The tragic-sublime "musical imaginary" documented above may make more headway in explaining Lenten tragic-sacred drama than does "between sacred and profane" as an essentially differential description. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to claim that tragic-

sublimity as a positive “referential” aesthetic entirely bypasses the question of difference.¹¹³ Although it may have deferred the issue, the tragic-sublime aesthetic in fact compounds the question of difference.

3.3 SUBLIMINAL MESSAGES?

I must address the differential nature of tragic sublimity now by turning my attention to a more troublesome topic: namely, how the tragic-sublime image of Old Testament patriarchs was contingent upon early nineteenth-century discourses about Judaism and Jewish musicality. Useful in this discussion is historian David Nirenberg’s concept of anti-Judaism, in which “Judaism” refers to “not only the religion of specific people with specific beliefs, but also a category, a set of ideas and attributes with which non-Jews can make sense of and criticize their world. Nor is ‘anti-Judaism’ simply an attitude toward Jews and their religion, but a way of critically engaging the world.”¹¹⁴ Nirenberg’s category of anti-Judaism is thus “differential” in accounting for how non-Jews may construct a sense of Self in opposition to (or as different from) Judaism as an “othered” category. Significantly, Nirenberg notes that anti-Judaism represents a broader conceptual category than that of “anti-Semitism,”¹¹⁵ an important distinction that I will also maintain as I now turn my focus more specifically to *Mosè*. That is, in relating *Mosè* to anti-Judaism, I do not mean that its libretto is strewn with virulently racist epithets or that its soundscape contains overt stylistic

¹¹³ I am referring here to what Catherine Belsey identifies as a key tenet of poststructural philosophy: namely, “[t]he simple inference that meaning is differential, not referential.” Belsey, *Poststructuralism*, 10.

¹¹⁴ David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 3.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

passages intended to mock Jewish musical practices. Nor am I claiming that the material processes involved in producing and performing *Mosè* were implicit in violence towards or oppression of Jewish communities.¹¹⁶ Rather, my point is simply this: to the extent that encyclopedic sources like Lichtenthal's help illuminate *Mosè*'s tragic-sublime aesthetic, then this aesthetic should not be isolated from those same sources' contribution to early nineteenth-century discourses about modern Jews and Jewish musicalities.

The connection between the tragic-sublime aesthetic and anti-Judaic discourse begins to emerge when one considers the prominent role that Old Testament Hebrews play in Italian-language music historiography of the early nineteenth century. For example, it seems that the generally "simple" nature of *Mosè*'s music in the opera was not an arbitrary aesthetic choice, but was rather linked in part to the image of ancient Hebrews as propounded in musical historiographies. Consider again Lichtenthal and his entry on "Chorale" (*corale*), where he gives the music of the ancient Hebrews an important place in the chorale's developmental history:

Up until the most remote antiquity of the Hebrews you could find vestiges of sacred-popular songs, which without doubt were very simple melodies. The reason for this is natural. First, because if they had been ornate and artificial, they would not have been able to be performed by a numerous people, of which the large part is not instructed in music. Second, because (hypothesized also by music cognition) the music of those times found itself still in its infancy among a rough people. Under David and Solomon the sacred Songs were organized in a more perfect mode, and they lasted even to the times of the Babylonian imprisonment.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ It is worth noting that Naples did not have a Jewish community at the time of *Mosè*'s premiere in 1818. The Jews had been expelled from Naples in 1541; besides a brief a period from 1740 to 1746, they were not allowed to return to the city until around 1831. Ariel Toaff, Sergio DellaPergola, and Samuele Rocca, "Naples," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, Gale Virtual Reference Library, <http://go.galegroup.com> (accessed April 12, 2014).

¹¹⁷ "Fin nella più remota antichità degli Ebrei trovansi vestigj di Canti sacri popolari, i quali senza dubbio erano melodie semplicissime. La ragione ne è naturale. Primo, perché se fossero state ornate ed artificiali, non avrebbero potuto essere eseguite da un numeroso popolo, di cui la maggior parte non è istruita nella musica. Secondo, perché (supposta anche la cognizione musicale) la musica d'allora trovavasi tuttora nella infanzia presso un popolo rozzo. Sotto Davide e Salomone

Fours years later, Lichtenthal's evolutionary perspective on sacred music was taken a step further by Pietro Gianelli in his 1830 publication *Dizionario della musica sacra e profana* (Dictionary of Sacred and Secular Music). In his entry on "chorus" (*coro*), Gianelli does not simply cite the ancient Hebrews as a primitive stage of musical evolutionary development, but he even goes so far as to speculate the chorus's very origins as lying with Moses himself:

Chorus. This item [*voce*] indicates a multitude of parts; and thus we name that musical composition that makes all the musical voices heard in a single period of time, executed with two, three, or four voices, or with voices and instruments. Philomela is believed to have been its inventor in [the year B.C.E.] 3,620. But in the Holy Scripture it was found that, having passed through the Red Sea, the people, directed by Moses, sang in various voices; therefore I believe that rather Moses could be said to be the inventor. This item then signifies the place in Catholic churches where the priests sing the divine praises.¹¹⁸

Here Gianelli refers to Exodus 15, when Moses, Miriam, and the Israelites are recorded as praising God—a song that is not represented at the end of *Mosè*, but that finds a near parallel in the chorus "Dal tuo stellato soglio" as a prayer of faith regarding deliverance that immediately precedes crossing the Red Sea. From a dramatic perspective, then, at the end of *Mosè* the audience nearly witnesses a representation of the chorus's invention as a musical form. Yet this raises a broader question: why is Gianelli so concerned that the historical roots of the Chorus should be traced not to Greek drama but rather to the Old Testament? The answer is, in part, typological: as

i Canti sacri erano ordinati in un modo più perfetto, e hanno durato sino a' tempi della prigionia babilonica." Lichtenthal, *Dizionario e Bibliografia della Musica*, vol. 1, s.v. "corale," 204.

¹¹⁸ "*Coro.* Questa voce indica moltitudine di parti; e così si nomina quella composizione musicale la quale fa in un sol tempo sentire le parti tutte della musica, eseguite a due voci, a tre, a quattro, oppure da voci e da stromenti. Filomene se ne crede l'inventore nel 3620. Ma nella Scrittura Sacra era ritrovo che passato il mar rosso, il popolo diretto da Mosè in varie voci cantò; dunque credo che Mosè piuttosto si possa dir l'inventore. Questa voce poi significa il luogo ove nelle chiese cattoliche li Sacerdoti cantano le divine lodi...." Pietro Gianelli, *Dizionario della musica sacra e profana, dell'abate Pietro Gianelli, terza edizione corretta ed accresciuta*, vol. 1, s.v. "coro" (Venice: 1830), 84, <https://books.google.com/books?id=KP1SAAAAYAAJ>.

I suggested in [Chapter 2](#) in the context of Lenten fasting, Western Christianity has historically been highly invested in typological readings of Old Testament stories that find their fulfillment in the Christian era. At present, however, more important than simply noting this typological tendency is a critical understanding of the impulses that sometimes drove it.¹¹⁹

The sublime rhetoric surrounding ancient Hebrew musicality was augmented and even fetishized by severing any ties that it might have had to modern Jewish musicality. This theme emerges at various points in Lichtenthal's entry on "Hebrews" (*ebrei*):

HEBREWS (Historical background of the music of the). It is by any means impossible to have a correct and sure idea about the much-praised music of the ancient Hebrews. No ancient historian [nor even] the Bible itself says anything other than that their music was very magnificent, expressive; in sum, most excellent. Therefore, there remains no other means than to gather the relevant information in the sacred books, and in a few other ancient writers, and then to pronounce with some probability a judgment on everything that concerns their music.¹²⁰

While Lichtenthal's enthusiasm regarding ancient Hebrew musicality is clear, equally clear in this entry is his suspicion of Jewish musical discourse after the time of Jesus. This point emerges as Lichtenthal reluctantly cites the Talmud when attempting to document the number of ancient Hebrew musical instruments: "The Hebrews had, if one can ever trust the information of the Talmudists, a much greater number of instruments than we possess today. In the work entitled

¹¹⁹ For a more detailed historical account of how Christian applications of typology have affected historical Christian-Jewish relations, see Biddick, *The Typological Imaginary*.

¹²⁰ "EBREI (Cenni storici sulla musica degli). Egli è affatto impossibile d'averne una giusta e sicura idea della così vantata musica degli antichi Ebrei. Nessun antico storico, la stessa Bibbia non dice altro che la loro musica è stata molto magnifica, espressiva, in somma, eccellentissima. Non resta dunque altro mezzo che di raccogliere le notizie relative ne' libri sacri, ed in alcuni pochi scrittori antichi, e di pronunciare poi con qualche probabilità un giudizio su tutto ciò che concerne la musica loro." Lichtenthal, *Dizionario e Bibliografia della Musica*, vol. 1, s.v. "ebrei," 237.

Scilte haghborim the number is set in the time of David and Solomon at *thirty-six*.”¹²¹ In Lichtenthal’s estimation, the Talmud is not simply unreliable as a source of spiritual knowledge about God and morality, it is unreliable as a source of any type of historical knowledge.

Lichtenthal’s dismissal of modern Judaic discourse comes through not only in his reluctance to cite the Talmud, but even more strongly in the parameters he sets for his entry on “Hebrews.” Although the Italian word *ebrei* can refer either to ancient Hebrews or to modern Jews, it is telling that Lichtenthal uses his entry to focus almost exclusively on the music of biblical Hebrews. After spending several pages gathering Old Testament citations to Hebrew music, Lichtenthal draws the diachronic historical portion of his entry to an abrupt close that essentially discounts any meaningful existence of Hebrew/Jewish musical traditions during the Christian era:

This [Babylonian] captivity gave the final blow to the Hebrews, and during 70 years they had time to forget their ceremonies and their songs. That painful forgetting is depicted in a moving way in Psalm 137 [sic, 137], *By the Rivers of Babylon* etc. Re-established in their city, but soon after fallen into captivity a second time, thereafter liberated, subsequently defeated by the Egyptians, by the Persians and the Romans, the unhappy Hebrews no longer had the necessary power nor the leisure for cultivating the arts.¹²²

Even if one understands the scope of Lichtenthal’s entry as limited to Hebrews in antiquity, it is noteworthy that he closes his account by dismissing Hebrew/Jewish abilities to “cultivate the arts” after being conquered by the Romans. In this way, Lichtenthal musicalizes a long-standing Western Christian trope of insulating Old Testament Hebrews from modern Jewish history.

¹²¹ “Gli Ebrei aveano, se mai si può fidarsi delle notizie de’ Talmudisti, un numero di strumenti molto maggiore di quello che in oggi possediamo. Nell’Opera intitolata *Scilte haghborim* si fa montare tale numero ne’ tempi di Davide e di Salomone a *trentasei*.” Ibid., 241.

¹²² “Questa cattività diede agli Ebrei l’ultimo colpo, e durante 70 anni ebbero il tempo di dimenticare le loro cerimonie ed i loro Canti. Tale dolorosa dimenticanza è dipinta in modo commovente nel Salmo 137, *Super flumina Babilonis* ec. Ristabiliti nella loro città, ma subito dopo caduti in cattività una seconda volta, poscia liberati, indi successivamente vinti dagli Egiziani, da’ Persiani e da’ Romani, gl’infelici Ebrei non avean più né il potere né l’ozio necessario per coltivar le arti.” Ibid., 241.

Furthermore, Lichtenthal underscores this idea with his passing interpretation of Psalm 137, which he cites as evidence of the Old Testament Hebrews having “forget[ten] their ceremonies and their songs.” The fact that Nicola Longo cites this same Psalm as an example of tragic sublimity would thus seem to tie the tragic-sublime aesthetic explored in this chapter to troubling nineteenth-century discourse about modern Jews and Jewish musicalities (or lack thereof).¹²³ Although neither Longo nor Lichtenthal explicitly say so, the apparent subtext for their writing seems to be a troubling understanding of Old Testament Hebrews as figures tragically fated to forget their sublime musical origins, and so become modern Jews.

The historical discursive connection between the tragic-sublime aesthetic and the trope of “modern Jews as having forgotten their sublime Old Testament musical roots” raises several important hermeneutical issues regarding musical perception and *Mosè*’s reception history. First of all, while historical evidence suggests that opera-goers in 1819 did in fact perceive musical moments such as “Dal tuo stellato soglio” in “coded” terms of tragic sublimity, they may not necessarily have consciously heard the sublime style coded in anti-Judaic terms.¹²⁴ Yet this lack of sonic immediacy does not mean that the discourse is not meaningfully present; by a curious turn, this lack of sonic immediacy even supports the connection. As Ralph Locke has noted, not all music intended to mark a given social identity as somehow “other” necessarily relies upon musical passages that are overtly marked as “exotic-sounding.”¹²⁵ Locke’s observation is

¹²³ For an investigation of nineteenth-century stereotypes about Jews as “noisy” and as averse to music, see Ruth HaCohen, *The Music Libel Against the Jews* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

¹²⁴ It is significant that the general aesthetic evinced in “Dal tuo stellato soglio” was not solely reserved for representations of Old Testament stories. For a listing of other musical pieces in the 1820s that employed a similar stripped-down musical aesthetic, see Marchi, “Rossini’s ‘Stabat Mater’ and the Aesthetics of 19th-Century Sacred Music.”

¹²⁵ Ralph Locke, “A Broader View of Musical Exoticism,” *Journal of Musicology* 44, no. 4 (2007): 477-521, at 479.

particularly important for understanding questions of representation in *Mosè*, where the positive agenda of assimilating ancient Old Testament Hebrews into the Neapolitan Catholic sense of “self” represented a somewhat circuitous route of “othering” modern Jews. Thus, searching for positive evidence “proving” that audiences originally heard anti-Judaic discourse directly through Rossini’s music is to look for evidence where it does not exist. It misses the critical point that assimilating Moses into an assumed Catholic soundscape constitutes a subtle silent erasure of his Jewish background.

Even as my primary agenda in this chapter has been a reconstruction of early nineteenth-century tragic-sublime discourse, this discourse should not be understood as relevant only to the earliest years of *Mosè*’s reception history. Nothing is to be gained by a positivistic insistence that would disallow the present from dialoguing with the past; such a narrow insistence overlooks the ways in which modern audiences are invested in the historical contexts of the music they hear, and sometimes do not hear. In a world where choices in musical programming are sometimes affected by a repertoire’s historical ties to anti-Semitic discourse,¹²⁶ the historical contingency of *Mosè*’s tragic-sublime aesthetic remains deeply relevant for the opera’s complex reception history in the twenty-first century.

Although *Mosè*’s tangential ties to nineteenth-century anti-Judaic discourse may be generally unknown to audiences today, it is significant that modern audiences are likely to perceive *Mosè* in terms of an anti-Judaic rhetoric belonging more properly to the twenty-first century. One notable example of this phenomenon is Graham Vick’s staging of *Mosè* at the 2011 Rossini Opera

¹²⁶ One might think here most notably about the Israel Philharmonic’s complex attitudes towards programming the music of Richard Wagner. See Richard Taruskin, “Only Time Will Cover the Taint,” in *The Danger of Music: And Other Anti-Utopian Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 21-24.

Festival,¹²⁷ a production that received a scathing review in a 2013 opinion piece written by journalist Myron Kaplan:

In Europe, where grand opera is a popular art form, propagandized anti-Israel opera productions are symptomatic of, and probably contribute to, an increase in anti-Semitism.

Gioachino Rossini's classic 1800s opera "Moses in Egypt," based on the biblical narrative, is the most recent of several opera productions in Europe misappropriated to vilify Jews and the Jewish state. Director/producer Graham Vick and set/costume designer Stuart Nunn have outfitted Moses to appear as a bin Laden-look-alike terrorist leader toting an assault rifle. But Vick makes sure Moses is easily recognized as a Jew since he always wears a tallit (Jewish prayer shawl).

All the music is from Rossini and the words sung are those of Rossini's librettist, but everything else in this production—made available in a video released in August 2013 and performed at the August 2011 Rossini Opera Festival in the composer's home town of Pesaro—is from Vick and Nunn. The production, a huge success in Europe, is meant to indoctrinate people with the idea that Israel is the villain in its conflict with the Palestinian Arabs. Judging by audience reception, the attempt seems to have succeeded.¹²⁸

Among other thematic interpretations that he offers of the staging, Kaplan suggests that

Director Vick seems to want the audience to imagine that the Israelites of 3,000 years ago in Egypt were complicit in the death's [sic] of the other side's children (plague of the first-born children—the final of the plagues visited upon the Egyptians) just as today's Israelis are allegedly responsible for supposed deaths and disappearances of Palestinian Arab children.¹²⁹

To whatever extent one concurs with Kaplan's analysis, at least the following is clear: that Vick uses his aesthetic sensibilities to draw an interpretive parallel between ancient Israelites and modern Jews. In this regard, Vick is hardly an innovator in the nearly two-hundred-year reception history of Rossini's *Mosè*. While Vick's provocative visual aesthetic may be proper to the twenty-

¹²⁷ Gioachino Rossini, *Mosè in Egitto*, DVD, Orchestra and Chorus of the Teatro Comunale di Bologna, Roberto Abbado, staging directed by Graham Vick (London: Opus Arte, 2012).

¹²⁸ Myron Kaplan, "Using Opera to Poison Minds Against Israel," Jewish News Service, September 3, 2013, <http://www.jns.org/latest-articles/2013/9/3/using-opera-to-poison-minds-against-israel#.U1RuAPk7um7> (accessed April 23, 2014).

¹²⁹ Ibid.

first century, it finds a distant and unassuming precedent in the tragic-sublime musical aesthetic that Rossini himself had employed nearly two centuries earlier.

What implications do these connections have, if any, for the ongoing reception of *Mosè* as the score approaches its third century of existence? While this remains to be seen, I would conclude by building upon the quote from Wye Allanbrook cited at the start of this chapter: any desires to “hear” unmediated sublimity in *Mosè* risk blindly perpetuating the latent ideologies that pre-structure sublime experience.¹³⁰ Of course, twenty-first century listeners approach *Mosè* with different conceptual-experiential filters than audiences did in 1819, and so these latent “prestructured” historical attitudes will not necessarily be activated for modern audiences. Yet given the choice, certainly knowledge of history must be preferable to ignorance.

¹³⁰ This hermeneutical issue has been addressed by Richard Taruskin in his discussion of “latent” and “manifest” musical meaning; this discussion concerns the delicate interplay between understanding what a piece of music “can mean,” and understanding historically what a piece of music “has meant.” See Richard Taruskin, “Shostakovich and the Inhuman,” in *Defining Russia Musically: Historical and Hermeneutical Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 468-544, at 480 ff.

4.0 (ANTE)-DILUVIAN CATASTROPHES: TRAGEDY AND BLAME IN DONIZETTI'S *IL DILUVIO*

“The Flood—the world’s most sorrowful tragedy—needs no introduction.”¹³¹

—Francesco Ringhieri, Introduction to *Il diluvio* (1788)

In [Chapter 3](#) I explored how the rubric of tragic sublimity provides an alternative to “the sacred” for understanding tragic-sacred drama, particularly in regard to *Mosè*; in this chapter I take a closer look at the “tragic” factor in the tragic-sacred-dramatic equation as it pertains to *Il diluvio*. As Ringhieri’s introduction to his 1788 prose drama suggests (as quoted above), the biblical flood was understood as tragic in nature in the late eighteenth century—a point that Donizetti presumably intuited in consulting Ringhieri’s text four decades later to write his Lenten sacred drama on the same subject. Yet two centuries later the tragedy of the flood does need an introduction, because the deaths that qualify Donizetti’s *Il diluvio* as tragedy do not speak for themselves. It is the purpose of this chapter to highlight not only what would have been immediately understood as tragic within *Il diluvio*, but also to view *Il diluvio* critically as an opera that endorses traditional gender roles as a means of creating social stability to make sense of a literally unstable world.

Specifically, I offer an interpretation of *Il diluvio* as tragedy that suggests how the opera pins the culpability of the flood on the inevitable moral failing of a female character who is tragically forced to choose between blaspheming the God of Noè and abandoning her familial duties to husband and son. While “opera heroines tragically fated by traditional gender roles” has

¹³¹ “*Il Diluvio, Tragedia luttosissima del Mondo, non abbisogna di Proemio.*” Francesco Ringhieri, *Il diluvio, tragedia del Rev. P.D. Francesco Ringhieri, monaco olivetano, riveduta e corretta dallo stesso* (In Venezia, appresso Antonio Zatta e figli, con licenza de’ superiori, e privilegio, 1788), 3, <https://books.google.com/books?id=Y0EqtzPmOZoC>.

been a common point of musicological focus since the late 1980s,¹³² this study advances upon this theme by demonstrating how the patriarchal rhetoric of *Il diluvio* echoes contemporary geological theories about catastrophes. In other words, the biblical flood is not a neutral historical background against which Donizetti's Lenten tale of gendered morality unfolds; rather, this gendered morality proceeds from these very same discourses. In this way this chapter provides a historical case study that speaks to a growing ecocritical interest in how human interactions with nature are guided by gendered tropes of nature in the popular imagination.¹³³

In connecting the worlds of Lenten tragic-sacred drama with geological and moral discourse on natural disasters, I am not claiming that Donizetti had any sort of authorial intention in *Il diluvio* to make a geological statement in his opera. Donizetti was not a geologist: the sources that he cited as inspirations for *Il diluvio* are all religious-literary sources rather than geological treatises,¹³⁴ and so scouring the score for insight into the geological nature of its conception of the flood would be to look for direct evidence where it does not exist. Yet even as *Il diluvio* is not specifically concerned with high geological discourse *per se*, it would be narrow-sighted to insist

¹³² Mary Ann Smart, "The Silencing of Lucia," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 4, no. 2 (1992): 119-41; Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*, with a new Introduction (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002 [1991]); Catherine Clément, *Opera: or, The Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing, foreword by Susan McClary (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

¹³³ Mark Carey et. al., "Glaciers, Gender, and Science: A Feminist Glaciology Framework for Global Environmental Change Research," *Progress in Human Geography* 40, no.6 (2016): 770-793; Tema Milstein and Elizabeth Dickinson, "Gynocentric Greenwashing: The Discursive Gendering of Nature," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 5, 2012: 510-32.

¹³⁴ As Jeremy Commons has noted, Donizetti described his literary inspirations for the libretto of *Il diluvio* in a letter to his father on 10 January 1830; his sources included works by Lord Byron, Francesco Ringhieri, and also "Luigi Isacco Sacy and Agostino Calmet, two learned religious writers of the late 17th and early 18th centuries." Jeremy Commons, "Il diluvio universale," 12n.1, liner notes for *Il diluvio universale*, by Gaetano Donizetti, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Giuliano Carella., with Mirco Palazzi, Majella Cullagh, Colin Lee, and Manuela Custer, ©2006 Opera Rara, in association with Peter Moores Foundation, ORC31 (2 compact discs).

that the opera's rhetoric regarding the causation of physical catastrophes was completely insulated from discourse surrounding natural disasters in Naples, a region that itself was prone to physical catastrophes. What I am suggesting, rather, is that the rhetoric of causality in *Il diluvio* draws from 1820s rhetoric of flood control, and that this rhetoric then takes a gendered spin. This perspective reveals Lent as an occasion for reflecting on a story that was at once tied up in discourses of religion, geology, and gender and morality.

This chapter unfolds in two broad sections. In the first section I begin to develop an epistemology of tragedy in *Il diluvio* by considering how tragedy-related concepts such as catastrophe and catharsis relate to the representation of the flood as both a catastrophic and cathartic event; this overlap takes on specific importance in Naples, where floods were common in the 1820s as a result of Mount Vesuvius's geological activity. In the second section I suggest how blame for the flood in *Il diluvio* is feminized by comparing the events at the end of the opera with nineteenth-century discourse on women's moral role in society.

4.1 TOWARD AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF TRAGEDY IN *IL DILUVIO*

Because tragedy has such a long conceptual history, any treatment of Donizetti's opera *qua* tragedy must be at least partly deductive in order to connect it meaningfully with established and codified understandings of the term. That the concept of tragedy is pertinent to a critical reading of *Il diluvio* is not in doubt: the opera was composed for Lent, and was thus connected to a self-stylized tradition of Lenten tragic theater in Naples dating back to the 1780s.¹³⁵ Furthermore, the title page of the

¹³⁵ For a historical overview on the cultural institution of tragic-sacred theater in Naples during Lent, see Anthony R. DellDonna, *Opera, Theatrical Culture and Society in Late Eighteenth-*

libretto lists it as a tragic-sacred drama (*azione tragico-sacra*).¹³⁶ Yet beyond these overt generic markers, in what other meaningful senses might *Il diluvio* be understood as tragic, especially in ways that bring literary-musical traditions of tragedy into contact with other discourses of tragedy? As an initial answer, I would highlight the overlapping senses of “catastrophe” that exist in *Il diluvio*. From an ecclesiastical perspective, the Genesis flood represents a physical catastrophe that brings about moral catharsis:¹³⁷ the flood’s catastrophic torrent “purifies” the earth by “purging” it of evildoers. In this sense it is understandable why the story of the Genesis flood would have been appropriate for representation during Lent, a season when Catholic faithful were to be “purged” of their sins. Yet while one might describe the flood as a “catastrophe” in this general physical-geological sense, it is noteworthy that the representation of the flood at the end of *Il diluvio* does not quite align with a narrower technical sense of “catastrophe” in dramatic theory. In this technical sense, “catastrophe” constitutes not the ruin itself, but rather the final act of “down turning” or “overthrowing” that brings about the ruin.¹³⁸ Thus, in *Il diluvio*, while the physical catastrophe of the flood might be seen as either an act of ruin or catharsis, the dramatic-theoretical catastrophe is none other than the moral failure and death of the operatic heroine.

Century Naples (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 153-56, referencing Paolo Fabbri, “Saverio Mattei e la ‘musica filosofica,’” *Analecta musicologica* 30, no. 2 (1998): 611-29.

¹³⁶ Domenico Gilardoni, *Il diluvio universale, azione tragico-sacra in tre atti, composta dal Sig.r Domenico Gilardoni, con musica del maestro Sig.r Gaetano Donizetti, da rappresentarsi nel Real Teatro di S. Carlo nella Quaresima del corrente anno 1830* (Napoli: dalla tipografia Flautina, 1830), https://books.google.com/books?id=1ZX_i1pSdYoC.

¹³⁷ It is worth noting that “catharsis” has a long historical connection to tragedy dating back to Aristotle, whose *Poetics* contains a quizzical description of tragedy as “effecting through pity and fear the purification [*katharsis*] of such emotions.” Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. and with an introduction and notes by Malcolm Heath (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 10. For an overview on current thought about *katharsis* in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, see Heath’s introductory comments on the work in the same source (xxxvii-xliii).

¹³⁸ In the Oxford English Dictionary, “catastrophe” is defined in the first sense as “the change or revolution which produces the conclusion or final event of a dramatic piece.” “catastrophe, n.” OED Online, December 2016, *Oxford University Press*, <http://www.oed.com>.

At this point my argument about tragic catastrophes in *Il diluvio* will be served by an overview of the opera's plot and a consideration of its key generic components. At a glance, the dramatic tension in the libretto of *Il diluvio* revolves around two opposed groups of people. The first group—Noè, his sons, and their wives—fear and worship God, and have built an ark to survive the prophesied flood.¹³⁹ By contrast, Cadmo is the wicked ruler of the city of Sennáár, and he and his subjects seek to lock up Noè's clan in the ark and set it on fire. The only point of commonality between these two groups is the character Sela, Cadmo's wife; although she is devoted to her husband and their young son, Sela also fears the God of Noè and desires shelter in the ark from God's wrathful flood. Sela's irreconcilable conflict of interests comes to a head by the jealous hand of Ada, one of Cadmo's concubines; in a slanderous bid to replace Sela as Cadmo's wife, Ada tells Cadmo that Sela is secretly in love with Noè's son, Jafet. Cadmo confronts Sela, and although Sela protests her innocence, Cadmo decrees that Sela be burned inside the ark along with Noè's family. The opera concludes with a hedonistic banquet thrown by Cadmo. Sela enters the banquet hall, having escaped from the ark; she proclaims that she cannot bear to leave her husband and son. Cadmo promises to reconcile with Sela on one condition: that she curse the God of Noè. Sela reluctantly attempts to comply, but the words catch in her throat and she dies before the curse is completed. The next moment, the chorus comments on the sky's extraordinary darkness; the rain begins and the flood submerges the city of Sennáár, but the ark is seen in the distance safely floating upon the rising waters.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ Throughout this chapter, I use the Italian "Noè" to refer specifically to the character in the opera, while I use the English name "Noah" to refer to the character of the same name as described in the book of Genesis.

¹⁴⁰ For a more detailed breakdown of how these character alignments relate to Rossini's earlier opera *Mosè in Egitto*, see Piperno, "Dividere il genere di musica profane dal sacro."

Even as the libretto of *Il diluvio* is labeled a “tragic-sacred drama,” for present analytical purposes it is helpful to consider this genre designation as a subset of historical (or mythic) epic.¹⁴¹ In historical epic, the broadest outlines of plot are generally predetermined by the audience’s *a priori* familiarity with certain well-established structural events of the historical narrative in question—I will call these key events “nodes.” The silent spaces between these structural narrative nodes may be “filled in” with imagined details regarding characters, storylines, conversations, and tableaux. If these new elements end up unreasonably violating the nodes, then the “social code” of the genre has been broken.¹⁴² Nevertheless, the most interesting part about historical epic may be precisely how the structural nodes are manipulated, bent, thwarted, or reinterpreted to shed new light on an otherwise rigid historical narrative—and this in ways that the “authors” may or may not consciously understand.

In an opera titled *The Universal Flood*, certainly the flood constitutes a major “node.” This is borne out by a contemporary newspaper review of *Il diluvio*:

In spite of all the company’s efforts, the last scene that represents the Flood does not leave the public satisfied. How to offer in a short space a spectacle so vast that does not insert itself in the human imagination? And exactly because the idea of that universal punishment [is] so gigantic in everyone’s mind, we believe it not only difficult but impossible to present an image of it that could make a profound impression upon the spirits.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ I am loosely applying the phrase “historical epic” to *Il diluvio* based on two qualifications: first, that early nineteenth-century Catholic audiences would have understood the flood as in some way historical; and second, that the Flood constitutes an “epic” event in terms of its proportions and the magnitude of its implications. In this regard one might say that there is a fine line between genres such as myth, historical epic, historical fiction, and alternate history.

¹⁴² The way in which I am speaking about “nodes” draws on Heather Dubrow’s classic formulation of genre as a social “code of behavior established between the author and his reader.” Heather Dubrow, *Genre* (London: Methuen, 1982), 2.

¹⁴³ “A malgrado di tutti gli sforzi dell’Impresa, l’ultima scena che rappresenta il Diluvio non lascia il pubblico soddisfatto. Come offrire in breve spazio uno spettacolo così vasto che non cape nella umana immaginazione? Ed appunto per essere così gigantesca in mente di ciascuno l’idea di quell’universale gastigo, noi crediamo non solo difficile ma impossibile il presentarne un immagine che possa far sugli animi una profonda impressione.” “NOTIZIE INTERNE. NAPOLI

Others elsewhere have noted the mechanical failures of the flood machinery at the end of the opera.¹⁴⁴ At present, however, I am less interested in the flood's machinery at the San Carlo than in the cultural imaginary of floods by which the flood became "so gigantic in everyone's mind"—in other words, sublime and inimitable. Doing this requires understanding the flood not simply as a Bible story, but as a phenomenon that existed at the overlap of nineteenth-century discourses of ecclesiastical dogma, geological history, and contemporary hydrology. While the fact that the flood represents a dramatic event in the biblical book of Genesis can begin to explain this, understanding the social imaginary of floods represents a bigger critical task of understanding how burgeoning geological discourse described the biblical flood as a "secondary catastrophe," and how the concept of flood as a secondary catastrophe took on heightened importance in 1820s Naples, where the ongoing volcanic activity of nearby Mount Vesuvius sometimes triggered floods as "secondary catastrophes."

The concept of secondary catastrophes arises in the geological writings of Scipione Breislak (1750–1826),¹⁴⁵ an Italian-born geologist of German descent who spent much of his career studying the geology of Campania. A sense of how the biblical flood was understood as a secondary catastrophe emerges in the following Italian-language book review of Breislak's then-recent *Institutions Gèologiques* (Milan, 1818):

The second volume ends with some reflections on the changes that the surface of the earth sustained after its consolidation and before the seas and continents took

12 marzo," *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, no. 59, 13 March 1830, p. 235, Neapolitan Section, National Library of Naples.

¹⁴⁴ See Commons, "Il diluvio universale," 23.

¹⁴⁵ Although of German descent, Breislak was born in Rome and spent the majority of his life in Italy. Much of his geological research was conducted in the Campania region, and one of his interests was the geological history of Vesuvius. "Breislak, Scipione," in *Complete Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, 439-440, Vol. 2 (Detroit: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2008), *Gale Virtual Reference Library* (accessed February 25, 2017), <http://go.galegroup.com>.

their present configuration: a configuration determined by a series of catastrophes, of which it is not possible to establish the physical origin and the particular effects, some of which could well even have been identical, no matter how diverse were the primary cause[s]; catastrophes that are depicted almost in miniature and [that] recall to memory the disasters and changes that even presently occur in some parts of the earth's surface from time to time. The flood of the Holy Bible was certainly one of the fundamental of these secondary catastrophes, intervening after man inhabited the earth. Yet to not attribute to the flood all the effects of the revolutions to which our earth was subjected, and to affirm that diverse geological phenomena seem not to reconcile with an extraordinary, universal and brief inundation: [this, therefore,] is certainly not to doubt the flood, or to admit the cause without attributing to it any effect. He is right in this just sense that one must understand what Breislak said: that is, that one must distinguish between the flood and its effects; and that respect for the authority of the holy books does not permit us to doubt the flood, but that examining the effects pertains exclusively to the physical.”¹⁴⁶

This overview of Breislak's work sketches a quick picture of geology, in dialogue with religious dogma, wrestling with the nature of causation.

While the quoted portion of the book review above deals with the primordial formation of the earth, the concept of “secondary catastrophes” was far from an academic topic amidst the volcanic activity of Mount Vesuvius throughout the 1820s. Located some six miles east of Naples,

¹⁴⁶ “Termina il secondo volume con alcune riflessioni sopra i cangiamenti che ha sofferto la superficie del globo dopo la sua consolidazione e prima che i mari e di continenti prendessero quella configurazione che hanno al presente: configurazione determinata da una serie di catastrofi, delle quali non è possibile di assegnare l'origine fisica ed i particolari effetti, alcuni dei quali poterono ben anche essere identici, comunque diversa ne fosse la loro causa primitiva; catastrofi, che ne sono dipinte quasi in miniatura, e richiamate alla memoria dai disastri e cambiamenti, che di tratto in tratto anche presentemente accadono in alcune parti della superficie terrestre. Il diluvio delle Sacre Carte fu certamente una delle principali di queste catastrofi secondari, intervenute dopo che l'uomo abitò la terra: ma il non attribuire al diluvio tutti gli effetti delle rivoluzioni a cui soggiacque il nostro globo, e l'affermare che diversi fenomeni geologici sembra che non si conciliino [sic] con una straordinaria, universale e breve innondazione [sic], non è al certo dubitare del diluvio, ovvero ammettere la causa senza attribuirle alcuno effetto. Egli è appunto in questo giusto senso che devesi intendere quanto disse Breislak, cioè che si ha a fare distinzione fra il diluvio, ed i suoi effetti; e che il rispetto all'autorità de' libri sacre non ci permette di dubitare del diluvio, ma che l'esame degli effetti appartiene esclusivamente alla fisica.” L. Configliachi, *Giornale di fisica, chimica, storia naturale, medicina ed arte: del Prof.re L Configliachi, membro dell' I.R. Istituto, compilato dal Dott. Gaspare Brugnatelli, decade secondo, Tomo II* (Pavia: 1819), 108, <https://books.google.com/books?id=lkAF86YKCBcC>.

Vesuvius was active throughout the 1820s, including in the weeks following the premiere of *Il diluvio universale* on 6 March 1830. Sixteen days later, on 22 March, the *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie* reported that “strong detonations were heard from Vesuvius on the 18th [of March] and following. Vortices of bituminous materials were observed yesterday in the interior of the mountain; and large quantities of smoke were seen rising from the crater in the shape of a pine tree.”¹⁴⁷ The volcanic activity continued through at least the start of April; on 7 April, the *Giornale* reported that “two new openings formed in the crater of Vesuvius, out of which erupted fire and bituminous materials that circumvented the enclosure of the same crater. For several days strong detonations are still felt.”¹⁴⁸

At first glance, the co-incidence of Vesuvius’s volcanic activity and the production of an opera on the biblical flood might appear to be just that: a coincidence of disparate events, one ashen and contemporary, the other watery and known only through literary and artistic representations. While it is true that volcanoes had their own social imaginary in the nineteenth century,¹⁴⁹ it is important to recognize Vesuvius’s violent volcanic activity throughout the 1820s was linked to a series of floods that proved particularly devastating for the nearby district of Nola (located some nine miles northeast of Vesuvius).¹⁵⁰ In this way, the lived experience of volcanoes

¹⁴⁷ “Il giorno 18 andante si udirono forti detonazioni del Vesuvio. Nell’interno del Monte si osservavano jeri vortici di materie bituminose; e dal cratere si vedeva sorgere gran quaniità [sic] di fumo in forma di pino.” “NOTIZIE INTERNE. NAPOLI 21 marzo,” *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, no. 65, 22 March 1830, vol. 1, p. 260, Neapolitan Section, National Library of Naples.

¹⁴⁸ “Nel cratere del Vesuvio si sono formate due nuove bocche dalle quali esso erutta fuoco e materie bituminose che si aggirano nel recinto dell’istesso cratere. Da più giorni si sentono ancora forti detonazioni.” “NOTIZIE INTERNE. NAPOLI 6 aprile,” *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*, no. 78, 7 April 1830, vol. 1, p. 311, Neapolitan Section, National Library of Naples.

¹⁴⁹ See Daly, “The Volcanic Disaster Narrative.”

¹⁵⁰ For further information, see Walter Palmieri, “Natura, uomini e dissesti: le alluvioni di Nola agli inizi dell’Ottocento” (“Nature, Humans and Instability: The Floods of Nola at the Start of the 1800s”), *Società e storia* 126 (2009): 615-33.

in Naples was not insulated from that of floods, as floods were sometimes experienced as “secondary catastrophes”—that is, catastrophes triggered by other types of geological activity.

As Walter Palmieri has noted in his historical study of geological discourse, volcanic activity generated a number of floods and mudslides that plagued Nola throughout the 1820s. Citing specific documents conserved at Naples’ State Archive, Palmieri has noted how, on at least three occasions in the mid-1820s, a government official in Nola consistently described the rain and floods with variations of the phrase “never before seen” (*mai veduto*). Palmieri highlights how this phrase begins to function rhetorically when used repeatedly to describe phenomena that in fact *have* been seen before:

The use of a linguistic formula that has lost its original meaning is therefore striking, and that seems to be the result of a process of removal, of a refusal to accept the riskiness of a territory in which, conversely, the tragic normality of events that...generated destructions and in some cases death, was established. It is therefore not entirely rash to hypothesize that that [phrase] “never before seen” is also used to conceal, at bottom, the attempt to emphasize the randomness and accidental nature of the event. Making the necessary distinctions and the appropriate relationships, the use of the term “natural” produces an analogous effect today: catastrophes become “natural” only when memory is lost of the tragic repeating of those same events in the past; they become “natural” in the attempt, more or less aware, to emphasize fatality, nature’s guilt, and simultaneously to distance human responsibility [and] the human causes that are at the base of confirming the greater part of these episodes.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ “Colpisce insomma l’uso di una formula linguistica desemantizzata, e che sembra il risultato di un processo di rimozione, di un rifiuto ad accettare la rischiosità di un territorio in cui, viceversa, la tragica normalità era costituita da eventi che, ove più, ove meno, generavano distruzioni e in alcuni casi la morte. Non è poi del tutto azzardato ipotizzare che dietro a quel “mai vedute,” si celi, in fondo, anche il tentativo di enfatizzare la casualità, l’accidentalità dell’evento. Fatti i dovuti distinguo e le debite proporzioni, un effetto analogo produce, ai giorni nostri, l’uso del termine “naturale”: le catastrofi divengono “naturali” solo quando si perde la memoria del tragico ripetersi di quegli stessi eventi nel passato, diventano “naturali” nel tentativo, consapevole o meno, di evidenziare la fatalità, la colpa della natura e al contempo allontanare le responsabilità umane, le cause antropiche che sono alla base del verificarsi di gran parte di questi episodi.” Palmieri, “Natura, uomini e dissesti,” 627-28.

Palmieri's explanation of the deceptive rhetorical phrase "never before seen" finds a poignant resonance in the culmination of *Il diluvio*, where the chorus refers to "a darkness never before seen [that] obscures heaven and earth from view."¹⁵² Admittedly, unlike the recurring floods in Nola, it is reasonable to suppose that such darkness had never been seen before within the diegetic story world of *Il diluvio*. But perhaps a "narrative immersion in the diegetic present" of *Il diluvio* in 1830 was conditioned by a broader "heterodiegetic" diluvial knowledge.¹⁵³ In this way the final chorus also echoes the geological rhetoric of the government official in Nola, who sought "to emphasize fatality, nature's guilt, and simultaneously to distance human responsibility"—although in the case of *Il diluvio*, the blame is shifted not from humanity onto nature or God, but rather from within humanity in general onto women specifically.

4.2 PATRIARCHS AND PATRIARCHY: PRECIPITATING THE FLOOD

Through the following musical analysis of the end of Act III of *Il diluvio*, I argue that Sela's blasphemy and death represent the primary (moral) catastrophe that triggers the flood as a secondary (physical) catastrophe. Although all the citizens of Sennáár die at the end of the opera, Sela's death is conspicuous—she is the only character to die before the flood rather than during it.

¹⁵² "Non mai viste tenebre / Ascondon cielo e terra." Throughout this chapter, English translations of the Italian libretto are taken from the liner notes of the following CD recording: Gaetano Donizetti, *Il diluvio universale*, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Giuliano Carella, with Mirco Palazzi, Majella Cullagh, Colin Lee, and Manuela Custer ©2006, Opera Rara, in association with Peter Moores Foundation, ORC31. The quoted text is found on page 137.

¹⁵³ I have borrowed the idea of diegetic and heterodiegetic knowledge from Nicholas Daly, who observes how Edward Bulwer-Lytton's 1834 novel *The Last Days of Pompei* "collapses" its diegetic story-world (set in 79 A.D.) with popularized archaeological knowledge about Pompeii in the early nineteenth century. See Daly, "The Volcanic Disaster Narrative," 274.

Furthermore, the rapid dramatic succession of Sela’s blasphemy, her death, and the onset of the flood assume heightened symbolism in light of the flood being explained as a divine punishment within the opera. As Sela is personally sacrificed by the God of Noè, her transgression and punishment are ritualized and fetishized. In short, Sela’s moral failure and subsequent death both literally and metaphorically “precipitate” the flood.

The interpretation that I have just suggested—between Sela as catalyst, the flood as cataclysm—relies in part on the rapid succession of events at the end of Act III. Against her wishes, Sela attempts to comply with her husband Cadmo’s demand that she reaffirm her loyalty to him by cursing the God of Noè. Unaccompanied, Sela attempts to gasp out the curse: “Cursed...be the God” (“Sia ...maledetto il Dio”) (see [Figure 5](#)).

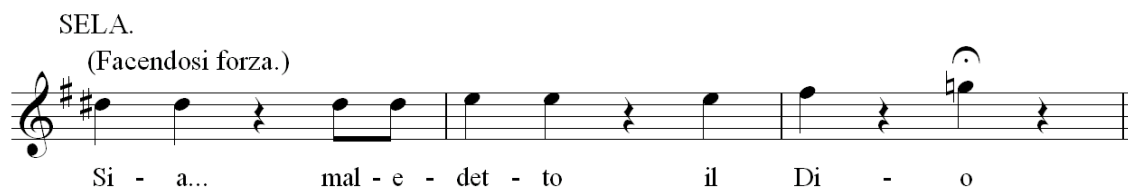


Figure 5. Donizetti, *Il diluvio universale*. Act III: Sela’s blasphemy.¹⁵⁴

In Donizetti’s score, Sela’s subsequent death and the onset of the flood occur within two bars of each other (see [Figure 6](#)). Her failed curse now leaving her gasping for breath, Sela emits a final unaccompanied sustained shriek on a high A (“Ah!”) in measure 1 of the example; in measure 2, the chorus observes “She is dead!” (“Spirò”); and in measure 3, the orchestra begins a half-step tremolo that the chorus interprets two measures later as the onset of the flood:

Ah! A darkness never before seen / Obscures heaven and earth from view! /
Thunderbolts and flashes of lightning break forth; / The elements war with each
other; / The Prophet is safe, and fearlessly / Defies the storms and bolts of lightning!

¹⁵⁴ Reproduced from Donizetti, *Il diluvio universale: Opéra in tre atti*, 224.

/ Everything Noè predicted / Is seen to come to pass!... / He spoke the truth; / The God we never believed in breathes vengeance!!!¹⁵⁵

SELA. Ah! Spi - rò

TUTTI Spi - rò

CORO. Ah! non mai vis - te te - ne - bre a - scon - don Cie - lo e ter - ra

Figure 6. Donizetti, *Il diluvio universale*. Act III: Sela’s death and onset of the flood.¹⁵⁶

At first glance, a causal relationship linking Sela’s blasphemy and the flood’s onset might seem to conflict with an internal “diegetic” reading of the opera’s libretto: beyond the fact that the opera begins with God already having decreed the flood, Noè as God’s prophet typically attributes the cause of the impending flood to the sin of humankind in general. Yet from a heterodiegetic perspective, the causal relationship I have suggested resonates with historical gendered discourse that cited women’s moral weakness as the cause of the biblical flood. Like the broader patriarchal trope of women as “the root of all evil,” the trope of “women as the cause of the flood” was well

¹⁵⁵ “Ah! non mai viste tenebre / Ascondon cielo e terra! / Scoppian saette e fulmini; / Van gli elementi in guerra; / Salvo è il Profeta, e impavido / Sfida procelle, e folgori! / Quanto Noè predisse / Tutto compir si mira!... / Il vero, il vero ei disse; / Il mai creduto Dio vendetta spira!!!” Donizetti, *Il diluvio universale*, 137-38.

¹⁵⁶ Reproduced from Donizetti, *Il Diluvio universale: Opéra in tre atti*, 225.

known in Italy at the turn of the nineteenth century. These ideas emerge in a 1794 publication by Rosa Califronia entitled *Breve difesa dei diritti delle donne* (Brief Defense of Women's Rights),¹⁵⁷ in which the author sets out to combat a number of negative stereotypes about women. Califronia explains the patriarchal logic as follows:

The fourth accusation is also unjust: *Women are full of vice [and] are the cause of every evil*. This, too, is an accusation covered from a great appearance of truth. The accusers begin *ab ovo*. They say that Eve, temptress and seductress of her husband Adam, was the horrible origin of all the infinite series of evils....¹⁵⁸

Califronia then describes how her accusers, armed with the typological figure of Eve, continue on to “make Women again at least half the cause of the universal flood that destroyed the human species by inundating the earth; since the Scripture says that *all flesh was immersed in vice*; of which women are culpable for the better half.”¹⁵⁹ In responding to this logic, Califronia protests that her male accusers conveniently overlook Adam's guilt in order to maintain their biblical “evidence” of women's morally suspect nature. Her rebuttal continues on to address the blame for the flood:

From this it follows that Women can also not be appealed to as the only cause of the great disaster of the universal flood; so confess the same accusers who also ascribe to their masculine gender that portion of evil that is convenient for them. The Holy Scripture does not state for us which was the greater iniquity—that of men, or of women—that produced the most serious penalty of the flood; and if it is

¹⁵⁷ Rosa Califronia, *Breve difesa dei diritti delle donne, scritta da Rosa Califronia, contessa Romana* (Assisi: 1794), <https://books.google.com/books?id=6juyPmA6enwC>. An extended discussion of Califronia's text can be found in the following source: Marianna D'Ezio, “Italian Women Intellectuals and Their Cultural Networks: The Making of a European ‘Life of the Mind,’” in *Political Ideas of Enlightenment Women: Virtue and Citizenship*, ed. Lisa Curtis-Wendlandt, Paul Gibbard, and Karen Green, 109-122 (New York: Routledge, 2013), at 118-120.

¹⁵⁸ “Iniquia si è la quarta accusa: *Le donne sono piene di vizi, sono la causa d' ogni male*. Questa pure è un' accusa ricoperta di una grande apparenza di verità. Incominciano gli accusatori *ab ovo*. Dicono che Madama Eva tentatrice, e seduttrice di Adamo suo consorte fu l'origine orribile di tutta l'infinita serie de' mali....” Califronia, *Breve difesa dei diritti delle donne*, 28.

¹⁵⁹ “Quindi fanno la Donna causa ancora, almeno per metà, dell' universale diluvio, che inondando la terra distrusse il genere umano; giacchè dice la Scrittura, che *ogni carne era immersa nei vizi*; di cui sono per una buona metà colpevoli le Donne.” Ibid.

legitimate for us to conjecture, we could say that, from the sacred text, men seem more culpable than women.¹⁶⁰

With Califronia's *Breve difesa* in mind, it is perhaps not hard to imagine a hypothetical response from the author had she witnessed a performance of Donizetti's *Il diluvio* three decades later. Although both male and female characters from Sennáár are understood to be "immersed in vice," Sela's conspicuous death foregrounds women as "culpable for the better half" of the resulting flood. From Califronia's perspective, framing Sela's demise as the immediate cause of the flood amounts to an (ante)-diluvian catastrophe.

It is one thing to identify the resounding gendered rhetoric at the end of *Il diluvio*; it is another thing to move towards a critical appreciation of the tragic-sacred-dramatic genre as a mechanism by which such cultural rhetoric is masked, perpetuated, and made normative. At this point I would expand upon a claim made earlier in the chapter; namely, that the tragic element in tragic-sacred dramas like *Il diluvio* (and also in *Mosè*, to which I will turn again in [Chapter 5](#)) are an inevitable byproduct of their "epic" nature. It is perhaps not too much of a stretch to describe Noah and Moses as "epic" or "heroic" figures within dominant Western literary imaginations: both have been historically interpreted as delivering their respective people from epic-historic-mythic events. Yet their roles as epic heroes in a tragic genre is not without problems. As English literature scholar Adrian Poole notes in her study on tragedy, "heroes are more at home in epic than in

¹⁶⁰ "Di quì ne segue, che la Donna nemmeno può appellarsi unica causa della grande rovina dell'universale diluvio; come il confessano gli accusatori medesimi, i quali ascrivono pure al loro genere mascolino quella porzione di male, che loro conviene. La sacra Scrittura non ci dichiara qual fosse maggiore l'iniquità degli uomini, ovvero quella delle donne, la quale produsse la pena gravissima del diluvio; e se è a noi lecito il conghietturare, potremo dire, che dal sagro Testo sembrano più colpevoli gli uomini, che le femine." Ibid., 30.

tragedy, where they are exposed to more complex ordeals and harder questions are asked of them.”¹⁶¹ Heroes, as Poole contends,

are exemplary, but they are not necessarily examples to follow. They are glamorous, charismatic, spectacular. But in tragedy they become a problem, not least for those around them, wives like Tecmessa in *Ajax*, sisters like Ismene in *Antigone*, rulers like Theseus in *Oedipus at Colonus*. From an everyday perspective, the hero seems like a reckless extremist, even when she has right on her side, as Antigone does.¹⁶²

In the case of Neapolitan tragic-sacred dramas such as *Il diluvio* and *Mosè*, epic-heroic characters like Mosè and Noè are props that are made to be a problem for those around them, especially for female characters like Sela who find themselves tragically trapped in irreconcilable moral conundrums.

To understand the interplay of tragic-sanctity and historical epic in *Il diluvio*, it is important to recognize that Sela’s irreconcilable moral conundrum and the “inevitability” of her subsequent death results from how Donizetti and his librettist, Domenico Gilardoni, manipulate the generic nodes of the flood narrative. Consider the moment in Act III when Sela rushes in to the banquet, having escaped from the ark, and explains that she “called upon the God of Noè, / But that God did not reply”¹⁶³ to her plea for deliverance. For Sela, the tragic reality is that the God of Noè cannot reply—the production of the operatic text itself forbids him from intervening. Sela cannot choose faith in God over devotion to her family, as doing so would subvert a secondary-yet-significant node of the story as derived from the Bible: namely, that only Noah and his family find salvation from the flood within the ark. Torn between the competing goods of faith and family,

¹⁶¹ Adrian Poole, *Tragedy: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 37.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁶³ “Di Noè chiamava il Dio, / Ma quel Dio non rispondea...!” Donizetti, *Il diluvio universale*, London Philharmonic Orchestra, 133.

Sela fights her struggle under the ill-fated storm clouds from which only the chosen can escape. From this point of view, it is significant that Sela is a new character for the flood narrative, one not present in the book of Genesis nor in Ringhieri's stage play.¹⁶⁴ Sela was introduced to the flood narrative, it seems, purely to die.

The mechanisms of gendering tragedy in *Il diluvio* may be further illuminated by comparison with a slightly later nineteenth-century text that espouses a similar understanding of women's morality. The text in question is an 1855 publication entitled *La donna cattolica* (The Catholic Woman),¹⁶⁵ written by Gioacchino Ventura di Raulica (1792–1861).¹⁶⁶ In the first part of his book, Ventura lays out the tenets underlying what he describes as “The Need of Catholicism for Woman” (“La necessità del cattolicesimo per la donna”).¹⁶⁷ In the topical heading provided for the first section of his treatise, Ventura expounds his perspective on what he sees as

*The admirable design of the Creator of having made woman morally stronger than man, and man physically stronger than woman. The power of woman over man for evil or for good, as pointed to by the Scripture. The barbarous manner in which woman was treated by some peoples [as] testimony of this same power.*¹⁶⁸

The second section relates the foregoing principles to societal stability:

¹⁶⁴ As Jeremy Commons has noted, “it is clear that [Donizetti] was also familiar with Byron's *Cain*, since he derives the names Sela and Ada (Zillah and Adah) from there.” Commons, “Il diluvio universale,” 12n2.

¹⁶⁵ Gioacchino Ventura, *Opere complete del Rev. Gioacchino Ventura: La donna cattolica, continuazione alle Donne del vangelo*, vol. 1 (Milano, Genova: 1855), <https://books.google.com/books?id=FRAjOURxuO4C>.

¹⁶⁶ Gioacchino Ventura was a preacher in the order of the Theatines, and his ecclesiastical career included time spent in Naples between 1821 and 1824. See F. Andreu, “Ventura di Raulica, Gioacchino,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2d ed., 441-443. Vol. 14 (Detroit: Gale, 2003), Gale Virtual Reference Library, <http://go.galegroup.com>.

¹⁶⁷ This phrase appears as a running header throughout the first part of the book.

¹⁶⁸ “§1. *Ammirabile disegno del Creatore di aver fatto la donna più forte dell'uomo nel morale, e l'uomo più forte della donna nel fisico. Il potere della donna sull'uomo pel male o pel bene, additato dalla Scrittura. La maniera barbara con cui la donna è trattata da alcuni popoli testimonia questo medesimo potere*” (italics original). Ventura, *La donna cattolica*, 23.

*Mission of the family: the woman is everything [in this regard]. Influence of religion and morality of woman, the most powerful [figure] upon the morality of family and of the state. This truth as recognized and attested to even by pagan wisdom. Horace attributes the fall of Rome to the corruption of women's customs.*¹⁶⁹

And the third section returns to the initial discussion on the gendered nature of morality:

*The power of woman with respect to sin [errore]. Man generates sin, but it is woman that conceives it and makes it grow. All false religions and all heresies are only established with the involvement of woman. The propagation and strengthening of Protestantism and of modern unbelief are her work.*¹⁷⁰

An initial surface-level reading of Ventura's content reveals some clear parallels with the gendered ideologies of tragedy that undergird *Il diluvio* (and also *Mosè*). Ventura's patriarchal logic flows somewhat paradoxically from his initial precept of women's moral superiority; placed on a higher moral pedestal than men, women inevitably topple farther and deeper into sins that have a greater impact upon society at large. One might suggest that what Ventura describes as "the need of Catholicism for woman" is in fact a rhetorical need for a scapegoat by which men justify their moral failings—in *Il diluvio*, Sela is this scapegoat. Yet the deeper critical point here concerns the techniques of textual production that lend authority to Ventura's opinions. Specifically, Ventura's text classically exemplifies how patriarchal agents seek to mask their own authority by erasing themselves from the very discourse they create. For example, Ventura argues that men are morally inferior to women; has not then Ventura, himself a man, undermined his own credibility as a moral commentator? But of course the reader is discouraged from making any such critical

¹⁶⁹ "§2. *Missione della famiglia: la donna vi è tutto. Influenza della religione e della moralità della donna, potentissima sulla moralità della famiglia e dello stato. Questa verità riconosciuta e attestata anche dalla sapienza pagana. Orazio attribuisce alla corruzione de' costumi delle donne la rovina di Roma*" (italics original). Ibid., 30.

¹⁷⁰ "§3. *Potenza della donna rispetto all'errore. L'uomo genera l'errore, ma la donna è quella che lo concepisce e lo fa crescere. Tutte le false religioni e tutte le eresie non si sono stabilite che pel concorso della donna. La propagazione e l'assodamento del protestantismo e dell'incredulità moderna sono opera sua*" (italics original). Ibid., 37.

inquiry that would implicate the author's identity in the discourse that he describes. Through frequent scholastic appeals to the Bible (with quotations given in Latin), Ventura performs the very authority he has assumed for himself and so raises himself above questioning. With Ventura there is no right or wrong, but only a dogmatic phantom that appears from nowhere and claims to exist self-referentially.

Ventura's self-masking patriarchal authority in *La donna cattolica* provides a loose parallel for understanding the self-masking authority underlying not only the manipulation of nodes, but also Mosè and Noè as operatic characters. Just as Ventura elevates himself above the gendered discourses of sin that he describes, so are Mosè and Noè largely exempt by their (male) composers and librettists from the operatic discourses of morality that unfold around them. Although both are understood to be male characters, neither Mosè nor Noè "generate sin," because biblical instances of their wrongdoing that might conceivably have constituted "nodes" in the opera—Moses as murderer and reluctant prophet, Noah as drunkard—are excluded from the operas. Furthermore, unlike the biblical Noah and Moses, Noè and Mosè are not given wives who might function as their "moral superiors." Noè and Mosè are instead presented as largely incorruptible and infallible, and this due in large part to the sublime sonic force fields that surround them. In this sense Noè and Mosè function as patriarchal phantoms who appear from nowhere as vestiges of patriarchal erasure.

The ideas that I have explored in this chapter in relation to *Il diluvio* play out in a related yet slightly different manner in Rossini's *Mosè*, the opera to which I return in [Chapter 5](#). While *Il diluvio* is a cautionary Lenten tale about the seismic effects of unredeemed feminine moral transgression, in *Mosè* the structural narrative "nodes" of the Exodus story are arranged to emphasize the need for feminine repentance. In *Mosè*, Sela finds a parallel character in Mosè's

niece, Elcia, the lover of the Prince of Egypt.¹⁷¹ While the Prince is fated to die in the biblical plague of the firstborn, this structural narrative “node” is leveraged to neutralize Elcia’s sexuality and turn her from a lover into a penitent (Lenten) mourner. Yet as I will suggest, the gendered musical rhetoric of Lenten penitence is not unique to *Mosè* as a tragic-sacred drama. The musicalized themes of penitence and purgation in *Mosè* owe much to another musical genre with cathartic associations, one that was just beginning to grip the imaginations of nineteenth-century audiences: the Requiem.

¹⁷¹ For a structural dramatic comparison of *Mosè* and *Il diluvio*, see Piperno, “Dividere il genere di musica profano dal sacro.”

5.0 PENITENTIAL GENRES: EXODUS AND PURGATORY IN ROSSINI'S *MOSE*

On 5 March 1818, seventeen days before Easter, Neapolitan operagoers observed the penitential spirit of Lent at the premiere of Rossini's opera *Mosè* at the Royal San Carlo Theater. This juxtaposition of opera with penitence initially appears counterintuitive given the frequent commentary of scholars on the Church's historical ban on operatic performance in Italy during Lent, a solemn season where oratorios provided reverent substitute for operatic spectacle.¹⁷² Indeed, *Mosè*'s oratorio-like qualities have often been at the center of scholarly attempts to justify the work's sanction for Lenten performance,¹⁷³ but while these formal traits may explain why *Mosè* was appropriate for Lenten performance, they do not fully explain the penitential cultural work that *Mosè* performed.

In this chapter I offer a case study that begins to map out a larger potential project of exploring the musical representations of repentance in numerous Western musical genres, both those traditionally categorized as sacred and as secular. As suggested in [Chapter 4](#), repentance in the face of impending judgment is an important theme in sacred drama. In this context I take up the theme of sacred drama as “between sacred and profane” by simultaneously developing it and criticizing it: developing it by offering a comparative reading of *Mose* with the Requiem, a “sacred” genre, and criticizing it from a gender-studies perspective. I develop this concept of the pervasiveness of repentance across genres by offering an allegorical comparison between *Mosè* and the Requiem, the liturgical Catholic funeral Mass which pleads for the deceased to be released

¹⁷² For an overview of this trope within the historical context of the oratorio, see Howard E. Smither, “Oratorio,” *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed October 21, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

¹⁷³ See Piperno, “Effetto *Mosè*.”

from Purgatory into Paradise. Working from an allegorical tradition established in Dante's *Divine Comedy* in which the Exodus serves as a metaphor for performing penance in Purgatory, I highlight how both *Mosè* and the Requiem revolve around the infernal imagery of the "Dies irae," a medieval liturgical poem within the Requiem that trumpets the need for repentance before Judgment Day. Specifically, the reading I offer demonstrates how *Mosè* reflects the penitential themes and musical styles also associated with the "Dies irae" in the Exodus figures of Israel (the redeemed), the Prince of Egypt (the damned), and the Prince's Hebrew lover (the penitent).

In terms of musicological disciplinary norms, it may seem a bit anachronistic to use a Catholic hermeneutical principle employed by Dante as the basis for creative musical score comparison. Admittedly so: unlike my reflections on tragic-sublimity in Lenten tragic-sacred drama ([Chapter 3](#)), which were rooted in journalistic documents pertaining to these works' early reception history, the specific comparison that I am drawing between Rossini's *Mosè* and the Requiem in this chapter is my own. Although the allegorical comparison between Exodus and Purgatory had longstanding historical roots on the Italian peninsula by the time Rossini composed *Mosè*, my purpose is not to prove that my allegorical reading of *Mosè* stems from the conscious authorial intentions of Rossini or his librettist, or that it provided a conscious mode of interpreting *Mosè* for the work's audiences at the San Carlo. Yet the reading I offer is not therefore entirely ahistorical, because I offer it as a means of framing two broader historical issues. First of all, as this chapter's literary conceit, the Exodus/Purgatory allegory happens to provide a useful organizational framework for suggesting something of the dramatic sound worlds that Rossini seems to have had in mind while composing *Mosè*. At a second and more critical level, this allegory reveals something of the logic upon which that sound world implicitly rests, and how musical style has encoded archetypal Christian themes in gendered terms. Specifically, the

Mosè/Requiem metaphor is useful for demonstrating how the theme of Christian repentance has often been explored through similar musical topoi that are predicated upon gender values and rhetoric, and this even across the traditional division of dramatic-narrative musical genres into sacred and secular.

The rest of this chapter unfolds in two broad sections. In the first section, I precede an interpretive comparison of *Mosè* and the Requiem with a historical overview of the Exodus/Purgatory allegory upon which it is loosely based. In the second section, I offer some concluding thoughts about the implications of understanding how repentance has been represented across musical genres.

5.1 SACRED/SECULAR CROSSOVER: TOWARD AN ALLEGORICAL READING OF *MOSÈ*

The allegorical reading of repentance in *Mosè* that I offer comes at the end of a long history of thinking about Moses in terms of sacred and secular. With its focus on repentance, this final chapter is meant as a sort of bookend to [Chapter 1](#), where I mentioned how sacred dramas, generally, have been understood from encyclopedic perspectives as existing “between the sacred and profane/secular.” Although I argued in [Chapter 3](#) that tragic-sublimity represents a better framework than tragic-sacredness for organizing historical data pertaining to tragic-sacred drama’s reception history, it would be premature to dismiss questions of sacred and secular as irrelevant or artificial. In one sense, *Mosè* has been implicitly approached in these very terms since the days of its creation. For example, after witnessing *Mosè* in Weimar in 1828, Goethe purportedly remarked: “And you will not deny that your ‘Moses’ really is too absurd. As the curtain rises, the people

stand there praying! This is most unfitting. It is written that when you wish to pray, then you shall go into your room and shut the door behind you. But in the theatre, one ought not to pray.”¹⁷⁴ Absurdity, of course, presupposes a standard of reasonableness; and for Goethe, *Mosè* reaches the peak of hypocritical non-sanctity, for at a level of irony of which the work itself is unaware—or is it?—*Mosè* demands repentance from its listeners even as the work itself transgresses cultural norms by representing penitential prayer in the theater. Does Goethe give a fair analysis of *Mosè*'s liminal social position, or does his reading of the work's misbehavior betray a fundamental misunderstanding of the relationship between sacred and secular spheres in the Neapolitan Catholic culture for which *Mosè* was composed?

While Goethe saw *Mosè* as inappropriately bringing “sacred” prayers into the “secular” realm of the theater, modern historians have noted a broader trend in the early nineteenth century toward a stylistic crossover between sacred and secular music. For example, musicologist Lucia Marchi has surveyed some of Rossini's music in relation to what she has theorized as “a *secular* aesthetics of religious music.” According to Marchi, her theory will address the current scholarly need

to account for the ‘other’ aesthetics of sacred music [. . .] I suggest that a parallel, progressive aesthetics runs through the [nineteenth] century, influencing composers and audiences. This line of thought supported modern stylistic devices in sacred music, and condemned any dogmatic imitation of the past. In certain cases, it went so far as to reject learned counterpoint, considering it a purely intellectual device, unfit to express religious sentiment.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Quoted in Reto Müller (trans. Neil Coleman), liner notes for Gioachino Rossini, *Mosè in Egitto* (1819 Naples Version), Stadtkapelle Bad Wildbad and Wurttemberg Philharmonic Orchestra, Antonio Fogliani, with Lorenzo Regazzo, Akie Amou, Wojtek Gierlach, Filippo Adami, Rossella Bevacqua, Giorgio Trucco, Karen Bandelow, Giuseppe Fedeli, and the Naples San Pietro a Majella Conservatory Chorus, © 2007 Naxos, 8.660220-21, http://www.naxos.com/mainsite/blurbs_reviews.asp?item_code=8.660220-21&catNum=660220&filetype=About+this+Recording&language=English.

¹⁷⁵ Marchi, “Rossini's ‘Stabat Mater’ and the Aesthetics of 19th-Century Sacred Music,” 360 (italics original).

Significantly, Marchi places Rossini within this trend of crossover aesthetics by noting how his *Messa di Gloria* (1820) received a mixed reception for eschewing the ecclesiastical contrapuntal tradition in favor of a more operatic style.¹⁷⁶ Marchi's theory recognizes the stylistic fluidity between sacred and secular music in the early nineteenth century, even as the theory implicitly assumes the necessity of the two concepts.

As I turn towards my allegorical reading of Rossini's *Mosè*, my purpose is related to Marchi's implicit observation that sacred/secular is not a totalizing dichotomy. Going a step further, I would suggest that, in some senses, the sacred/secular musical dichotomy is already a product of the same Western Christian historical thought systems that values the concept of repentance, and that has tended to construct repentance in gendered terms. Thus, I will suggest the sound world Rossini had in mind by comparing certain poignant moments in the score of *Mosè* with the scores from other moments the Requiem, a "sacred" genre that was only just beginning to be performed in "secular" or "civic" concert settings in Europe. Yet beyond questions of musical style, I am also interested in exploring how those stylistic cross-references converge to form what I will call the "rhetoric of repentance" in *Mosè*. This rhetoric of repentance relies not only on certain musical styles (most notably the stylistic *topos* of the *ombra*), but also on those styles as being already prefigured in gendered terms. This reading will offer a new understanding of how *Mosè*'s historical "between sacred and secular" status (as described in [Chapter 1](#)) was contingent upon gendered rhetoric. At the broadest level, it will also open up discussions of how repentance as a major theme in the Western Christian tradition of sacred music theme of repentance often found in sacred music.

¹⁷⁶ See *ibid.*, 347.

A quick overview of *Mosè*'s libretto will suggest some of the ways in which the work blends models of repentance in a manner that resists categorization as either sacred or secular. The librettist for *Mosè* was Andrea Leone Tottola; his primary source was a 1760 five-act tragedy by Francesco Ringhieri about the Prince of Egypt, entitled *L'Osiride*.¹⁷⁷ Tottola's libretto revolves around alternations between Faraone (Pharaoh)¹⁷⁸ hardening his heart, and then relenting and promising to let the Hebrews go. However, Faraone's son, Prince Osiride (Osiris), is secretly in love with a Hebrew woman named Elcia; and because the Hebrews' departure would end their relationship, Osiride continually works to change Faraone's mind and retain the Hebrews in bondage. In Act II, Faraone arrests Mosè (Moses) and orders him to be executed at a public assembly. Elcia rushes in to the assembly and publicly confesses her guilty affair with Osiride. When Osiride still refuses to free Mosè, Mosè calls down a thunderbolt upon the Prince and fulfills the Plague of the Firstborn. The opera ends with the Hebrews crossing the Red Sea and Faraone's army drowning.

In the past, it has been conventional for scholars to refer to "sacred" and "profane" characters in Lenten operas, and to use scare quotes to acknowledge the problematic nature of these concepts while tacitly and provisionally accepting them. By this logic, heroes from the Bible such as Mosè and Aronne would constitute "sacred characters," while Elcia, although a Hebrew, would likely be considered "profane" because of her affair with Osiride, which does not appear in the Bible. Technically, Osiride is represented in the Bible only insofar as the Bible refers to the

¹⁷⁷ Richard Osborne, "Mosè in Egitto," *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed October 21, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

¹⁷⁸ Throughout this chapter, I use anglicized versions of names (Moses, Aaron, Pharaoh, Osiris) in a general way to refer to characters from the Bible and mythology. I employ the Italian version of these names (Mosè, Aronne, Faraone, Osiride) to refer specifically to the characters within the libretto.

death of Pharaoh's firstborn. But while Osiride's character is largely invented and would not be considered a "sacred" character in most taxonomic approaches to this genre, the Prince nonetheless fully partakes in the allegorical Requiem logic of *Mosè*. First, Osiride derives his name from the ancient Egyptian god of the dead and the afterlife.¹⁷⁹ Osiride's symbolic name not only foreshadows his fate, but also casts Egypt as a realm of death for the Hebrews who live there. Seen through the interpretive lens of the Requiem, the Hebrews are the metaphorically deceased who seek deliverance. The second point relates to the love story between Osiride and Elcia and its implications for genre. Franco Piperno has suggested that *Mosè*'s success was due to its delicate balance of opera and oratorio; that is, it balanced musical prayers and choruses with bel canto love arias.¹⁸⁰ I agree with Piperno, but I would also reiterate that to theorize *Mosè* primarily as a synthesis of "sacred" and "secular" storylines or musical forms risks underestimating the allegorical potential of Lenten opera, in which all action onstage carries symbolic meaning for the audience. In the case of *Mosè*, even a "profane" love story lends itself to allegorical interpretations, for if a Requiem must have a deceased, it must also have a damned and a penitent. In *Mosè*, Osiride represents the obstinate and blasphemous sinner who is lost, while Elcia represents the ideal (feminine) model of the penitent who repents of her lustful sins and is saved on the Day of Wrath.

Italian literary culture had a long legacy of viewing the Exodus story as an allegory for the repentance required to leave Purgatory for Paradise, a concept which lies at the heart of the

¹⁷⁹ Although Ringhieri had named the Prince of Egypt "Osiride" in 1760, the symbolism of the name would have been more prominent amidst the Egyptomania that followed Napoleon's campaign to Egypt (1798–1801). Audience members who knew of Mozart's *Magic Flute* would also have been exposed to the name "Osiris" from Sarastro's Act-II prayer to Isis and Osiris. See Francesco Ringhieri, *L'Osiride: Tragedia del P.D. Francesco Ringhieri, monaco ulivetano, e lettore di teologia* (Padova: nella stamperia Conzatti, con licenza de' superiori, 1760), https://archive.org/details/bub_gb_Noel_NmiAJUC.

¹⁸⁰ Piperno, "'Effetto *Mosè*.'"

Requiem. In Canto II of Dante's *Purgatorio*, Dante and Virgil witness more than a hundred penitent souls chanting Psalm 114 as the Angel of God ferries them towards the island of the Mount of Purgatory: "In exitu Israel de Ægypto" ['When Israel went out of Egypt'], / Sang they all together with one voice, / With what of that psalm is thereafter written."¹⁸¹ Dante's juxtaposition of Exodus and Purgatory implies an allegorical relationship between the two; in his Letter to Cangrande della Scala, Dante interprets Psalm 114 as symbolizing "the exit of the sanctified soul from the slavery of this corruption to the liberty of eternal glory."¹⁸²

Dante's allegorical reading of Psalm 114 provides a literary impetus for my comparative reading of *Mosè's* ruminations on the Exodus with the Requiem as a genre that presupposes a journey through Purgatory. Dante's image of the newly deceased penitents singing of the Lord accompanying Israel during the Exodus bears a striking resemblance to the Requiem chant "In Paradisum," which was commonly sung as the body of a newly deceased Christian was processed to the cemetery:

May the angels lead you into Paradise;
at your coming
may the martyrs receive you,
and conduct you
into the holy city, Jerusalem.
May the chorus of Angels receive you,
and with Lazarus, once a pauper,
eternally may you have rest.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Carlyle, Okey, and Wicksteed, 203.

¹⁸² Quoted in English translation in *ibid.*, 205n2.

¹⁸³ "In Paradisum deducant te Angeli; / in tuo adventu / suscipiant te martyres, / et perducant te / in civitatem sanctam Jerusalem. / Chorus Angelorum te suscipiat, / et cum Lazaro quondam pauper / aeternam habeas requiem." Throughout this chapter, quotations from and English translations of the Latin Requiem texts are taken from Robert Chase, *Dies Irae: A Guide to Requiem Music* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 1-10. Slashes (/) are used to indicate line breaks; double slashes (//) are used to indicate stanza breaks. The text quoted above is found on page 10.

What follows is an interpretive allegorical reading of *Mosè* that highlights its penitential themes and suggest how they derive from nineteenth-century musical and literary discourses on repentance, most notably the Requiem Mass and the musical *topos* of the *ombra*. Again, I do not claim this interpretation to represent the authorial “intentions” of composer or librettist; indeed, to speak of authoritative interpretations is to misunderstand the multifaceted nature of allegory and the competing interpretations it invites. Rather than to trace out how these themes were subsequently interpreted, my purpose at present is merely to highlight the salient penitential aspects of the work and to suggest parallels with other available cultural texts relating to penitence.

As a final note, it is not insignificant that Rossini produced several versions of *Mosè* beyond the 1818 original, including a slightly revised score in 1819, a French version for Paris in 1827 (*Moïse et Pharaon*), and a subsequent translation of the French version into Italian, often referred to as *Mosè nuovo* (New *Mosè*). While the different versions would necessarily invite differing interpretations stemming from both differences in the score and libretto and from their different cultural-historical contexts, I have chosen to work from the revised 1819 edition of the score in which Rossini included the newly composed prayer chorus “Dal tuo stellato soglio.” [Table 1](#) offers a suggested correlation of select Requiem texts¹⁸⁴ with scenes in *Mosè*.

¹⁸⁴ In Rossini’s time the Requiem Mass was similar to the normal Catholic Mass but with several differences, most notably the omission of the Gloria and Credo and the inclusion of the “Dies Irae” sequence of texts. Alex Lingas, “Requiem Mass,” *The Oxford Companion to Music*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed September 1, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

Table 1. Comparison of Select Requiem Texts with Passages in Rossini’s *Mosè*

Select Requiem Texts	Corresponding Scene and Section in <i>Mosè</i>
Introit: Requiem aeternum	I.i – Chorus, “Ah! Chi ne aita?”
Kyrie	I.i – Chorus, “O Nume d’Israel!”
“Dies irae” sequence: Tuba mirum/Rex tremendae	I.ii – Mosè, “Eterno! immenso!”
Ingemisco	II.vi – Elcia, “La rea cagion di tanti affanni”
Confutatis	II.vi – Mosè, “Così attera Iddio...”
Lacrimosa	II.vi – Elcia, “Oh desolata Elcia!”; III.i – Elcia, “In questo cor dolente”
Libera me	III.i – Mosè, Aronne, coro, “Dal tuo stellato soglio”; III.ii – Ensemble, Stage directions for orchestral Finale

The opera begins in Egypt during the (ninth biblical) plague of darkness. The chorus laments the darkness and prays for mercy: “Ah, who can help us? Oh heaven! When will this pall of darkness be torn open?”¹⁸⁵ “O God of Israel! If you long to free your faithful people, have pity on [Osiride] and on us!”¹⁸⁶ This prayer for light and for mercy closely parallels the combined pleas of the Requiem Introit “Requiem aeternam” and the following “Kyrie eleison.” The “Requiem aeternam” prays for respite and light: “Grant them eternal rest, O Lord, / and may perpetual light shine upon them.”¹⁸⁷ The “Kyrie eleison” prays for mercy: “Lord, have mercy.”¹⁸⁸ The music for the opening chorus also betrays its uneasy relationship with the Mass, or at least that Rossini was somehow thinking along these same lines. Philip Gossett has referred in passing to the start of

¹⁸⁵ “Ah! Chi ne aiuta? Oh ciel! Si tenebroso vel quando si squarcierà?” Unless stated otherwise, quotations from and English-language translations of the libretto throughout this chapter are taken from Lionel Salter’s 1982 translation of the revised 1819 libretto as printed in the CD liner notes for the following recording: Gioachino Rossini, *Mosè in Egitto*, revised original Italian version (1819), Philharmonia Orchestra, Claudio Scimone, with Ruggero Raimondi, Siegmund Nimsgern, June Anderson, and the Ambrosian Opera Chorus, © 1982 by Universal International Music BV, © 2008 Decca Music Group Limited, 4780149 DM2 (2 compact discs). The text quoted above is found on page 32.

¹⁸⁶ “Oh Nume d’Israel, se brami in libertà il popol tuo fedel, di lui, di noi pieta.” Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ “Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine / et lux perpetua luceat eis.” Chase, *Dies Irae*, 3.

¹⁸⁸ “Kyrie eleison. / Christe eleison. / Kyrie eleison.” Ibid.

Mosè in his analysis of Rossini's *Messa di Gloria* (1820); Gossett describes the Kyrie of the *Messa di Gloria* as "a composition of considerable force and unity, reminiscent in its structural tautness of the opening chorus of *Mosè in Egitto*."¹⁸⁹ With their similarities in reverent tone and construction around a single motive,¹⁹⁰ the introduction of *Mosè* and the Kyrie of the *Messa di Gloria* run parallel to each other in a culture that saw increased intermixing of ecclesiastical and theatrical musical styles.

After the introduction, Faraone illuminates the tension that will drive the plot for the rest of the opera: God's requirement of a sacrifice. Faraone speaks to God: "Are you calling your chosen Hebrews to the desert, where the great sacrifice you desire may be fulfilled? I promise this and oppose it no more, and respect your wish."¹⁹¹ The Catholic association of "sacrifice" with the Eucharist in the Mass is implicit at this point in the allegory; although the Eucharist would not have been physically present within the San Carlo, the central concept of the "sacrifice" in *Mosè* invokes its allegorical presence.

Mosè intercedes for the people with a ceremonious prayer that acknowledges God's greatness and begs for mercy:

Eternal, infinite God, past all understanding!
Ah, Thou who dost ever guard
the safety of Thy servants
and dost shower Thy people with favours:
ah, Thou who dost hold in just balance
the weight of our labours:
ah, Thou who art the Holy One, the Just,

¹⁸⁹ Philip Gossett, "Rossini in Naples: Some Major Works Recovered," *Musical Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (1968): 316-40, at 336.

¹⁹⁰ With its construction around a single motive, the opening of *Mosè* arguably relates it to a tradition of Requiems by composers associated with Naples who interwove a repeating "motto" theme through the orchestra, most notably the Requiems of Cimarosa (1787) and Paisiello (1797). The practice is described in Chase, *Dies Irae*, 217.

¹⁹¹ "I tuoi dilette Ebrei chiami al deserto, ove si compia / il grande sacrificio che brami? / Io lo prometto, / più mi oppongo, / e il tuo voler rispetto." Rossini, *Mosè in Egitto*, 34

the Mighty, who dost punish the oppressor
of Thy people, glorify Thy name,
display Thy clemency,
and with a new marvel return to Egypt's eyes
the light that vanished.¹⁹²

Mosè's prayer presents a moment rich in intertextual references, many of them to Mozart. The three-fold invocation to the eternal, immense, and inconceivable God is punctuated by three brass chords that resemble the start of the overture to Mozart's *Magic Flute* (1791), an opera about light triumphing over darkness. Richard Osborne has also astutely connected the brass fanfare and the simple triadic arpeggiation of Mosè's invocation with the arpeggiated trombone fanfare in Mozart's Requiem setting of "Tuba mirum spargens"¹⁹³ (1791). In this case the brass suggests the final trumpet on Judgment Day:

The trumpet shall spread a wondrous sound
Through every grave, in all lands,
It will drive mankind before the throne.¹⁹⁴

I find an even more compelling allusion to Mozart's setting of the "Dies irae" text "Rex tremendae," which parallels Mosè's adoration and prayer for mercy:

King of awe-ful majesty,
Who freely saves the redeemed,
Save me, O fount of goodness.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² "Eterno! immenso! incomprendibile Dio! / Ah tu che vegli ognora / de' tuoi servi allo scampo, e 'l popol tuo / colmi di benefizi: / ah tu che in giusta lance / delle opere nostre osservi il peso, / ah tu che sei il Santo, il Giusto, il Forte, / che l'oppressore del popol tuo punisci, / glorifica il tuo nome, / fa' pompa di clemenza, / e dell'Egitto a nuova meraviglia / il lume che sparì rendi alle ciglia." Ibid., 36.

¹⁹³ Richard Osborne, "Mosè in Egitto," *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed October 21, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

¹⁹⁴ "Tuba mirum spargens sonum / Per sepulcra regionum / Coget omnes ante thronum." Chase, *Dies Irae*, 5.

¹⁹⁵ "Rex tremendae majestatis, / Qui salvandos salvas gratis, / Salve me, fons pietatis." Ibid., 6.

Mozart begins his setting with a three-fold repetition of the word “Rex” ([Figure 7](#)) that mirrors Rossini’s setting of the opening invocation ([Figure 8](#)). Furthermore, Mozart sets the “Rex tremendae” with dotted rhythms characteristic of a French overture, a quality also found in Rossini’s music at this point. The stylistic allusions to Mozart are significant, because Mozart’s Requiem became the standard measuring rod against which all other Requiems in the early nineteenth century were compared.¹⁹⁶ That Rossini had studied and admired Mozart’s music from his youth further underscores the comparison.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ For a study in reception history of Mozart’s *Requiem* as the standard for Requiems in the nineteenth century, see Lau, “In Memory of a King,” 174.

¹⁹⁷ Servadio, *Rossini*, 22.

Grave

Soprano
Alto
Tenore
Basso

Piano

Archi
Archi, C. di. B. Fag, Tromb, Org
Archi

Rex!
Rex!
Rex!
Rex!

Tutti
Tutti
Tutti
Tutti

Rex!
Rex!
Rex!
Rex!

Rex tre-men-dae ma-je-sta-tis,
Rex tre-men-dae ma-je-sta-tis,
Rex tre-men-dae ma-je-sta-tis,
Rex tre-men-dae ma-je-sta-tis,

Tr. C. di. B. Fag, Tromb.

sf
ff
ff
ff

Figure 7. Mozart, Requiem. “Rex tremendae,” mm. 1-7.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Reproduced from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Requiem in D minor, K. 626*, reprint by unidentified publisher (Moscow: n.d. [ca. 1880], 21, <http://ks.imslp.net/files/imglngs/usimg/a/af/IMSLP86906-PMLP02751-moz-req.pdf>).

Moderato. Moses.
E - ter - no im - men - so, in - com - pren - si - bil Dio!

Figure 8. Rossini, *Mosè in Egitto*. Act I: “Eterno! Immenso! Incomprensibil Dio!”¹⁹⁹

In the climax of Act II, Elcia’s confession initiates a series of events that resemble the texts from the “Ingemisco,” “Confutatis,” and “Lacrimosa” texts from the “Dies irae” sequence. Just before Mosè is to be publicly executed, Elcia bursts in and confesses her guilty relationship with Osiride:

[I am] the guilty cause
of so much trouble, she who,
born in the bosom of Levi, made herself
unworthy of her forebears and her God.
Yes, in me you see the unhappy victim
Who, in ill-advised passion,
throwing aside restraint,
clasped to her bosom
her lover, your prince.²⁰⁰

Elcia’s confession of her sexual iniquity parallels the groaning confession of the Requiem’s “Ingemisco” text and its reference to Mary Magdalene, who is traditionally believed to have been a prostitute:

I groan like a guilty man.
Guilt reddens my face.
Spare a suppliant, O God.

¹⁹⁹ Reproduced from Rossini, *Il Mosè in Egitto: Opera seria in tre atti di Gioachino Rossini*, 13.

²⁰⁰ “. . . la rea cagion / di tanti affanni e tanti; colei / che nata a Levi in sen si rese / de’ genitori e del suo nume indegna. / Sì, vedi in me la vittima infelice / che a sconsigliato ardor / sciogliendo il freno / sua consorte, il tuo prence, / accolse in seno.” Rossini, *Mosè in Egitto*, 74.

Who didst absolve Mary Magdalene
And who didst hearken to the thief,
To me also hast Thou given hope.

My prayers are not worthy,
But Thou in Thy mercy, grant
That I burn not in everlasting fire.

Place me among the sheep
And separate me from the goats,
Setting me on Thy right hand.²⁰¹

Whereas Elcia's repentance brings about an eleventh-hour pardon, Osiride receives no mercy on Judgment Day. "Ah! That base sorcerer shall perish. / Vile, wicked man, die!"²⁰² Osiride exclaims before being struck by a tempestuous musical lightning bolt. The brass choir re-enters, and Mosè denounces Osiride's unrepentant heart: "Thus does God strike down / stubborn presumption."²⁰³ At the end of the act, the chorus rhetorically confirms that this is the Day of Wrath: "Oh Egypt! O fearful moment! / Oh day of destruction!"²⁰⁴ Osiride's fiery punishment for denying Mosè as God's prophet is appropriately Dantean, as it resembles the sixth circle of the *Inferno* and the fiery tombs of arch-heretics (Canto IX). The musical style at this moment is also significant; with Mosè's dotted rhythms, monotone recitations, and octave leaps, his vocal style typifies the musical topic of the *ombra*—that is, shade or shadow—a style often used to represent the supernatural ([Figure 9](#)).²⁰⁵ Mozart uses this same style in *Don Giovanni*, when the

²⁰¹ "Ingemisco tamquam reus, / Culpa rubet vultus meus, / Supplicanti parce, Deus. // Qui Mariam absolvisti / Et latronem exaudisti, / Mihi quoque spem dedisti. // Preces meae non sunt dignae, / Sed tu bonus fac benigne, / Ne perenni cremer igne. // Inter oves locum praesta, / Et ad haedis me sequestra, / Statuens in parte dextra." Chase, *Dies Irae*, 6.

²⁰² "Ah! cada quel mago indegno. Indegno e rio, cada!" Rossini, *Mosè in Egitto*, 77.

²⁰³ "Così atterra Iddio / un pertinace ardir!" Ibid.

²⁰⁴ "Oh Egitto! oh istante orribile! / Oh giorno sterminator!" Ibid., 78.

²⁰⁵ For a more detailed theoretical account of the *ombra* style, see Clive McClelland, "Ombra and Tempesta," in *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory*, ed. Danuta Mirka, 279-300 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Commendatore drags the unrepentant libertine into hell ([Figure 10](#)). However, this authoritative and stormy style was also typical in setting the Requiem's "Confutatis maledictis" and its reference to the damned consigned to the flames:

When the accursed have been confounded
And given over to the bitter flames,
Call me with the blessed.²⁰⁶

Rossini's stormy style following Osiride's death is similar to Mozart's and Cherubini's Requiem settings of the "Confutatis maledictis," both of which employ the musical topic of the *tempesta*.

²⁰⁶ "Confutatis maledictis / Flammis acerbis addictis, / Voca me cum benedictus." Chase, *Dies Irae*, 6.

Mosè.

Co - si at - ter - ra Id - di - o un'

per - ti - na - ce ar - dir, co - si at - ter - ra Id -

di - o un per - ti - na - ce ar - dir.

pp

Figure 9. Rossini, *Mosè in Egitto*. Act II Finale: Mosè's judgment of Osiride's death.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ Reproduced from Rossini, *Mosè in Egitto*, 188.

il commendatore.

Tu m'in - vi - ta - sti a ce - na, il tuo do -

ver or sa - i, ri - spon - di - mi, ri -

spon - di - mi: ver - ra - i tu a ce - nar me - co? oi - bò, oi -

Leporello.

Figure 10. Mozart, *Don Giovanni*. Act II: mm. 59-73.²⁰⁸

The penitent Elcia survives—a miracle, considering that penitent opera heroines later in the nineteenth century usually die.²⁰⁹ Nevertheless, this moment represents her death as an individual character with a story arc distinguished from the rest of the Israelite chorus. Her last act as an individual is to weep for Osiride and for her own pain: “Oh inconsolable Elcia! / Oh bitter,

²⁰⁸ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Don Giovanni: Drama giocoso, posto in musica e ridotto per il piano forte da W. A. Mozart* (Paris: Marquerie Frères, n.d. [ca. 1838]), 259, http://ks.imslp.net/files/imglinks/usimg/0/05/IMSLP225713-PMLP36804-Mozart_-_Don_Giovanni_VS2_IArch.pdf.

²⁰⁹ See Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*.

immeasurable anguish! Your dearest one, the object / of your love, is dead! / Torments, agonies, and frenzies, / you break my heart asunder. / You fill me with all the rage / of hell or of the Furies. / You rend my soul, / which still has to bear its pain.” These sentiments parallel those of the Requiem’s “*Lacrimosa dies illa*” text, which speaks of weeping on judgment day:

Mournful that day
When, from the dust shall rise
Guilty man to be judged.
Therefore spare him, O God.
Merciful Jesus, Lord
Grant them rest.²¹⁰

I conclude my parallel reading of *Mosè* and the Requiem by explaining one more scene that parallels the Requiem text “*Libera me,*” which was traditionally sung as the deceased was about to be lowered into the ground to be buried. Its text reads as follows:

Deliver me, Lord from eternal death,
on that dreadful day,
when the heavens and the earth shall move,
when you come to judge the world through fire.
I am made to tremble and fear,
at the coming destruction, and also at your coming wrath.
That day, day of wrath,
calamity and misery
great and exceedingly bitter day.
Rest eternal
grant them, Lord.
And may perpetual light shine on them.²¹¹

These lines resonate with the prayers of the Hebrews as they call out to God from between the Red Sea and the Egyptian army. In the second verse of the Act-III prayer “*Dal tuo stellato*

²¹⁰ “*Lacrimosa dies illa / Qua resurget ex favilla / Judicandus homo rus. / Huic ergo parce, Deus. / Pie Jesu, Domine, Dona eis requiem.*” Chase, *Dies Irae*, 6.

²¹¹ “*Libera me, Domine de morte aeterna / in die illa tremenda, / quando coeli movendi sunt et terra, / dum veneris judicare / saeculum per ignem. / Tremens factus sum ego, et timeo, / dum discussio venerit, / atquae ventura ira / Dies illa, dies irae / calmitatis et miseriae . dies magna at amara valde. / Requiem aeternam / dona eis, Domine. / Et lux perpetua luceat eis.*” Chase, *Dies Irae*, 9.

soglio,” Aronne prays to God: “If elements and spheres / are obedient to Thy powers, / graciously show an escape / to our wandering uncertain feet!”²¹² The destruction that the Hebrews will escape comes in the form of the waters of the Red Sea, as the Exodus narrative mandates, and not in the fiery form that the Requiem would suggest. If fire and water seem polar opposites, in the logic of Catholic symbolism the two are closely linked: as one is either cleansed in the baptismal fount or inundated by the flood, so one is either refined by the fire or consumed by it. The Hebrews’ prayers are answered, and the Egyptians are indeed buried beneath the waves after Israel escapes on dry ground.²¹³ The stage directions for the last scene read as follows:

All [of the Egyptians] advance into the sea, but they remain submerged under the waves that stormily and rapidly come back together. The scene becomes obstructed by dense clouds that then disperse, letting us see the sea rendered already calm, and in the distance, on the opposite shore, the Hebrew people, who kneel down and give thanks to the Lord of Hosts.²¹⁴

This scene compresses the acts of burial and communion.²¹⁵ As the Egyptian army is buried in the sea, the Hebrews render unto God a sacrifice, and in the Catholic tradition “sacrifice” is

²¹² “Se pronti al tuo potere / son elementi e sfere, / tu amico scampo addita / al dubbio errante piè.” Rossini, *Mosè in Egitto*, 80.

²¹³ To extend the Dante metaphor a bit further, one might note the similarities between the Israelites passing through walls of water out of Egypt, and Lustful in the seventh terrace of Purgatory who must pass through a wall of fire to enter Paradise (*Purgatorio*, Canto XXV).

²¹⁴ This is my own translation of the stage directions at the end of the Tottola’s libretto. “Tutti s’inoltrano in mezzo al mare, ma vi restano sommersi dalle onde, che, tempestose, e rapidamente si riuniscono. La scena s’ingombra di dense nubi, che poi diradandosi lasciano vedere il mare reso già tranquillo, ed in distanza, sull’opposto lido, il popolo Ebreo, che genuflesso rende grazie al Dio degli Eserciti.” Andrea Leone Tottola, *Mosè in Egitto: Azione tragico-sacra di Andrea Leone Tottola, rappresentata nel Real Teatro S. Carlo e quivi riprodotta nella Quaresima del 1819* (Napoli: dalla Tipografia Flautina, 1819), 34. <https://books.google.com/books?id=8NEDpsGrkboC>.

²¹⁵ *Mosè* omits a representation of the Passover Seder meal, perhaps through the Catholic logic of supersession wherein the Christian Eucharist replaces the Jewish Passover. Interestingly, the Passover is not wholly absent from Ringhieri’s originally tragedy: in Scene XV of Act IV in *L’Osiride*, the Angel of the Lord gives Moses specific instructions for sprinkling the blood of a lamb for observing the Passover. Ringhieri, *L’Osiride*, 84.

associated with the Eucharist. The clouds in the stage directions suggest the presence of God himself, for, according to the book of Exodus, “the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light.” (Ex. 13:21; KJV). These stage directions encapsulate the closing sentiments of rest and perpetual light as expressed in the “Libera me” text. For the Hebrews on the far side of the sea as for the faithful before a brilliant monstrosity on the high altar, to be in the presence of God is to rest in everlasting light.

5.2 CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS ON THE POLITICAL AND CULTURAL RELATIONS OF THE REQUIEM TO *MOSE*

There are numerous possible rich connections that may be fruitful for further exploration. I have spoken above about Dante as a hypothetical allegorical key for reading Rossini’s *Mosè*. Although Dante penned his epic poem five hundred years before Rossini composed *Mosè*, the close association that I have suggested—of Dante as link between the Exodus story and the Requiem’s references to Purgatory—finds further validation in Dante’s popularity as a literary and political figure throughout Italy during the nineteenth century.²¹⁶ This was true not only in the poet’s hometown of Florence, but in Naples as well, where the power of Dante’s image was displayed nowhere more clearly than in the San Carlo Theater itself. The theater had been destroyed by a fire in 1816, and when the newly rebuilt theater reopened in 1817, its ceiling featured a fresco by Giuseppe Cammarrano entitled “Apollo presenting to Minerva the Greatest Poets of the World.”²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Aida Audeh and Nick Havely, “Introduction,” in *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century: Nationality, Identity, and Appropriation*, ed. Aida Audeh and Nick Havely, 31-50 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²¹⁷ Gaia Servadio, *Rossini* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2003), 59.

The still-extant fresco features a crowd of individuals surrounding Apollo, who points towards Minerva and a golden sun representing her wisdom; although the individual poets depicted in the fresco are small and difficult to discern, Dante Alighieri ranks chief among them. Moreover, it is not insignificant that Rossini's letters reveal an enthusiasm for Dante's *Divine Comedy*, as Gaia Servadio has noted.²¹⁸ Rossini had demonstrated this enthusiasm only two years before *Mosè*, when he had gone against his librettist's wishes in *Otello* (1816) by insisting on setting a stanza spoken by Francesca da Rimini in Dante's *Inferno* (Canto V).²¹⁹

The allegorical reading presented above also opens up other avenues for comparison with other cultural forms employing allegorical readings of Bible stories during Lent. As one example, Howard Smither has noted the occasional performance of oratorios in the ecclesiastical context of the Devotion of the Forty Hours, a service that commemorates Christ's forty hours in the tomb by placing the consecrated Eucharist in a monstrance on the high altar as an object of devotion. Smither provides a summary:

In the seventeenth century, decorations for the Forty Hours became extremely elaborate, establishing a tradition that continued until well into the nineteenth century. The entire chapel of the high altar would be transformed into a large theatrical scene (called a *teatro*, *apparato*, or *macchina*) with deep perspective. Such scenes - intended to interpret and glorify the Eucharist - usually represented a biblical story, often treated allegorically.²²⁰

This performance context of the Forty Hours' Devotion had a rich historical tradition in Naples. The first explicit reference to the practice in Naples dates from the late sixteenth

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

²¹⁹ See Maria Ann Roglieri, "From 'le rime aspre e chioce to la dolce sinfonia di Paradiso': Musical Settings of Dante's 'Commedia,'" *Dante Studies, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society* 113 (1995): 175-208, at 181.

²²⁰ Smither, "Oratorio and Sacred Opera, 1700-1825," 94.

century,²²¹ and its practice in Italy in general has been documented as late as 1825 (Rome).²²² Of the Forty Hours Devotion in Baroque Naples, John A. Marino notes: “In addition to its role as an antidote to Carnival and preparation for Lent, the devotion was also practiced in supplication and penance at the time of war, economic crisis, the health of the king, plague, and natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, and eruptions of Vesuvius.”²²³ Significant in this exposition is not only the association of the Forty Hours’ Devotion with Carnival, but also the fact that scenes from the Bible—including the Exodus—were sometimes used as a visual backdrop for the service²²⁴ in order to convey a didactic lesson. Within the church context the didactic allegorical messages may have been primarily spiritual, but when Moses enters the theater he becomes a carnivalesque figure, one who fosters upended social hierarchies by granting Mosaic masks to legitimize various agendas.

Further observations may be made in connection with the political situation in Naples as the time of *Mosè*. As the political situation in Bourbon-Restoration Naples was not dissimilar to that of Bourbon-Restoration France, examining the political function of the Requiem in France may help to clarify the possible functions of *Mosè* in Naples. Such a cross-national comparison is not without grounds: the two polities had been connected through the Neapolitan King Ferdinand’s recently deceased wife, Queen Maria Carolina (1752–1814), who had followed the events of the French Revolution closely for its implications for her sister, Marie Antoinette.²²⁵ Musicologist Ho-

²²¹ John A. Marino, *Becoming Neapolitan: Citizen Culture in Baroque Naples* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 229.

²²² Mark S. Weill, “The Devotion of the Forty Hours and Roman Baroque Illusions,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 37 (1974): 218-48, at 240.

²²³ Marino, *Becoming Neapolitan*, 229.

²²⁴ Mark Weill has noted the presentation of scenes from the Exodus as the apparatus for a Devotion of the Forty Hours during the Roman Carnival of 1646. Weill, “The Devotion of the Forty Hours and Roman Baroque Illusions,” 234.

²²⁵ Santore, *Modern Naples*, 17.

Yee Connie Lau has suggested how the liturgical Requiem of the Italian-born French composer Luigi Cherubini (1760–1842) placed the traditionally religious form in the service of broader French civic and political goals during the Restoration: premiered in 1817, just one year before *Mosè in Egitto*, Cherubini's Requiem in C minor was performed at a ceremony commemorating the twenty-third anniversary of the execution of King Louis XVI. As Lau notes, Cherubini's Requiem figured into the Restored Bourbon Monarchy's agenda of creating a culture of "nostalgia and amnesia" in France: nostalgia for the peace of the *ancien regime*, and amnesia and political amnesty regarding the violent crimes of the Revolution. Cherubini's Requiem thus represented a passive-aggressive political tool demanding repentance by reminding the people of revolutionary sins in a solemn musical ritual unlikely to incite further revolution.²²⁶ I suggest therefore that the Neapolitan monarchs saw in Rossini's *Mosè* a type of analogue to what Cherubini's Requiem had meant for the Restored French monarchs.

If King Ferdinand was eager to marshal Dante's image in the fresco of San Carlo to legitimize his reign, there is no doubt that he would have gladly turned to the titular hero of Rossini's *Mosè* for the same purpose.²²⁷ From the point of view of the Neapolitan political establishment in 1818 and those who supported it, *Mosè* presented a pro-monarchical message based on the concept of Divine Right: as Moses triumphed over Pharaoh and established the divine origins of his leadership, so Ferdinand IV resumed his rightful leadership (admittedly with

²²⁶ Yo-Hee Connie Lau, "In Memory of a King: Luigi Cherubini's C Minor Requiem in Context" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2009), 115.

²²⁷ During his tenure in Naples from 1815 to 1822, Rossini had composed a handful of pieces to accompany royal functions of the Neapolitan Monarchy. These pieces include a birthday cantata entitled *Giunone* (1816), *Le nozze di Teti, e di Peleo* (1816), *Omaggio umiliato a Sua Maestà* (1819), and a Cantata composed for visit of Francis I (1819). See Philip Gossett, "Rossini, Gioachino," *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed November 23, 2015, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

concessions to French social innovations) after his defeat of Murat. *Mosè* could also be interpreted from an ecclesiastical point of view, in which case the work could represent the Church's bid to retain its sway on the public following the anti-clericalism of Murat's reign. Musicologist Franco Piperno has noted that the Church had had an uneasy relationship with Neapolitan Lenten opera beginning in the 1780s:

if not reduced to impotence and to silence, the Neapolitan clergy would have seen in the rise of this new phenomenon a plausible (albeit exterior and superficial) religious manifestation and above all an effective means for presenting Bible stories—be it even through the profane means of operatic seduction—to a society corrupted or corruptible by Enlightenment ideas and natural philosophy.²²⁸

Even if *Mosè* presented an account of the Exodus “seduced” by the operatic stage, the Catholic Church would presumably have welcomed *Mosè* as a bastion against total secularism as it reconsolidated its ecclesiastical power during the Bourbon Restoration and following the concordat of 1818.

In light of the recent restoration of political powers to Ferdinand and to the Catholic Church, Moses as a pro-monarchical or a pro-clerical figure seems to offer the clearest “sanctioned” messages latent within *Mosè*. Yet the power of sanction implies the power of dissent, of subversion. In fact, that the story of the Exodus should have been approved at all by the censors is surprising, because Moses was a contested figure who invited multiple conflicting interpretations. The same Moses who could justify a theocracy or a monarchy had also inspired the French revolutionaries who spread the seeds of republicanism in Naples in 1799 and then again

²²⁸ “. . . se non ridotto all’impotenza ed al silenzio, il clero partenopeo dovette vedere nell’insorgere di questo nuovo fenomeno una plausibile ancorché esteriore e superficiale manifestazione di religiosità e soprattutto un efficace mezzo per attrarre alle storie bibliche, sia pure per il tramite profane della seduzione operistica, una società intaccata o intaccabile da idee illuministe e dalla filosofia naturale.” Piperno, “‘Stellati sogni’ e ‘immagini portentose,’” 274.

between 1806 and 1815. In his study of the symbolic work of Judaic figures in Western philosophy, David Nirenberg has noted that

the Enlightenment tradition, from Spinoza to Kant, represented the transformations it hoped to achieve in Christian terms, as the replacement of a ‘Mosaic’ world of slavery to law and letter by one of truth and human freedom. The revolutionaries were the heirs of this radical critique. Like their forefathers, they saw themselves overthrowing the Old Covenant in favor of a new and better constitution, one based on nature and human reason. . . . And again like their forefathers, the concepts through which they made sense of these new covenants and constitutions were saturated with the Christian logic of supersession.²²⁹

Supersession, of course, implies typological comparison between otherwise disparate entities, and this is what made narratives such as the Exodus and the Requiem so powerful in the early nineteenth century. As repentance narratives, both the Exodus and the Requiem were double-edged swords; at the same moment that the Exodus could call for repentance, it could incite revolution.²³⁰ Similarly, the allegorical roles of “righteous judge” and “sinner” within the Requiem are easily flipped depending on the current political winds. The allegorical power of these stories problematizes the commonly proffered Romantic explanation of their popularity: namely, that the infernal and dramatic imagery of the Requiem, of the Exodus, and of Dante’s *Divine Comedy* offered ample opportunities for vivid musical depiction that appealed to the Romantic sensibilities of early nineteenth-century composers. This approach has been particularly appealing to explain the proliferation of so-called “concert” settings of the Requiem in the mid-nineteenth century, and would represent an easy solution to account for the increase in musical settings of Dante’s *Inferno*²³¹ in the decade following Rossini’s *Mosè*. But the weakness of the Romantic explanation

²²⁹ Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, 363.

²³⁰ For a structuralist interpretation of the Exodus narrative and its themes of slavery/bondage and Egypt/The Promised Land, see Michael Walzer, *Exodus and Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

²³¹ For a listing of musical settings of Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, see Roglieri, “From ‘le rime aspre e chioce to la dolce sinfonia di Paradiso,’” 199-206.

is its reliance upon the bankrupt concept of secularization as a function of modernist linear progress, because secularization fails to describe how traditionally religious stories or services function when they venture outside the church walls. The allegorical potential of these stories undermines this narrative; if anything, they just as easily attest to the desires of civic powers to “sanctify” themselves by donning the vestments of traditional religion.²³²

In the final analysis, the Requiem provides a powerful and fruitful metaphor for *Mosè in Egitto* because of its brilliant contrasts of light and darkness. From the “Requiem aeternum” Introit to the “Libera me,” the Requiem traces a broad narrative arch of everlasting light that span the fires and darkness of the “Dies irae.” Similarly, *Mosè* begins and ends with light-related miracles, with lightning strikes of judgment interspersed. Yet the dazzling Requiem lights risk blinding whoever tries to wield them. Even more dangerous are attempts to share the light with others. Thus, following Mosè’s initial restoration of light to Egypt, Aronne does not realize the irony of inviting Faraone to “Let a ray of this light / clarify your minds again.”²³³ If the Requiem beseeches a higher power to “let everlasting light shine upon them,” the question remains: which light? The light of the Catholic Church? The light of traditional monarchy? The light of liberal Enlightenment values? Or some alloy combining all three? Rossini’s *Mosè* crystallized within a Naples embroiled in asking just such questions.

²³² The concept of “sanctification” must acknowledge the competing conceptual grounds of “sacredness” that come from the fields of history and sociology. Historically, to speak of the sacred often relates to the church or organized religion. But there has long been a debate in sociology about the rise of nationalism as a “civic religion” during the nineteenth century. For a recent summary of this debate, see Jose Santiago, “From ‘Civil Religion’ to Nationalism as the Religion of Modern Times: Rethinking a Complex Relationship,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48, no. 2 (2009): 394-401.

²³³ “Di questa luce un raggio / vi schiari ancor la mente.”

6.0 CONCLUSION

You cannot go on “seeing through” things for ever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it.

—C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*²³⁴

To see Lenten tragic-sacred drama and a variety of social issues through it: this has been this dissertation’s critical reflexive goal in approaching “sacred music” both as an object of social criticism and as a conceptual framework for performing that criticism. I have viewed my subject with the perspective that the virtual impossibility of speaking objectively about “sacredness” does not diminish its importance as a focal point of humanistic inquiry. In the present case, to ignore the rhetoric of sacredness that has attended the Western Christian musical-philosophical tradition of sacred music would fail to take seriously an engrained category of nineteenth-century thought that governed, both implicitly and explicitly, the creation and understanding of sacred dramas on the Italian peninsula. Yet there is also a particular need to balance deductive and inductive approaches to scholarship, so as not simply to recycle received or dogmatic ideas about what counts as “sacred.” My own solution has been to create a conceptual mosaic that juxtaposes a number of historical and modern critical perspectives by combining the methods of archival research and comparative musical score analysis. In so doing I have created a distinctly thematic and topical treatment of Lenten tragic-sacred drama in early nineteenth-century Naples.

My general approach to the creation of meaningful cultural-historical knowledge has been to relate disparate events not primarily in terms of causation or diachronic sequence, but rather to look for rhetorical resonances between cultural phenomena occurring more or less synchronically.

²³⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001 [1944]), 81.

At times I have sought to ground these rhetorical resonances in the actual perspectives of definite historical actors. For example, through critical readings of early journalistic reviews of *Mosè* and *Il diluvio*, a solid evidential foundation emerges for claiming that the reviewers understood these tragic-sacred dramas in rhetorical terms of tragic sublimity ([Chapter 3](#)). Yet this demonstrated connection is ultimately valuable for how it highlights the potential resonance between tragic-sublime rhetoric and social imaginaries of Judaism in a *de jure* Catholic society. While such comparison necessarily ventures into the realm of informed speculation, it is at the limits of the provable that one often discovers the most fertile ground for further research.

At other times I have been less concerned that the comparisons I have made should be seen as arising from the clear perspective of a historically circumscribed actor or group of actors. For example, in reading Lenten theater closures as a type of Lenten abstinence ([Chapter 2](#)), I have written from something akin to the imagined hypothetical perspective of a historical participant-observer. In this case, I have written as one generally familiar with the typological thought patterns as evidenced by the writings of early nineteenth-century ecclesiastical officials on the Italian peninsula, but who ultimately employs those thought patterns to develop themes more closely rooted in twenty-first-century humanities social-critical values. Thus, in exploring the limitations of typological comparison, my purpose has been to acknowledge the reality of fasting, but at the same time to decenter it as a normative practice. Similarly, in comparing the sonic and literary themes of *Mosè* with those of the Catholic Requiem Mass ([Chapter 5](#)), my broader purpose has been an appropriation of the ecclesiastical allegory of the Exodus as a type of release from Purgatory. In this regard, comparative score analysis is not an end in and of itself, but rather becomes a strategic tactic for considering how musicalized gendered rhetoric resonated across the boundaries of musical genre.

To extend this dissertation's titular metaphor of the mosaic a bit further, it is worth noting that mosaics not only create an additive semblance of unity, but are also inherently unfinished: they can always be expanded or connected with neighboring designs. Thus, there is room for expanding this mosaic for reconstructing other historical perspectives regarding music and sacredness during Lent. In terms of other works specifically commissioned for Lent in Naples, one relatively unstudied work is Pietro Raimondi's *Giuditta* (1827), a work loosely based on the deuterocanonical book of Judith. Further study about how the feminine protagonist is treated in this work could bring the Neapolitan tradition of Lenten sacred drama into greater dialogue with gender studies, perhaps with a greater emphasis on the lived experiences of gender for the work's creators, performers, and audiences. Additionally, it is noteworthy that during Carnival of 1830, immediately before the premiere of *Il diluvio*, Donizetti had written a one-act comic work entitled *I pazzi per progetto* (roughly translated, "Madness by Design").²³⁵ As creative minds often run along parallel tracks even while working on different projects, comparing *Il diluvio* with *I pazzi per progetto* could shed new light on Donizetti's poignant proclamation concerning the relationship between sacred and secular music in *Il diluvio*.

One further avenue to explore is the intersection of sacred music, typological modes of knowledge creation and organization, and nationalism during the Italian Risorgimento. I have intentionally reserved mention of the broad political movement culminating in the 1871 Italian unification until now, because I have wanted to challenge the teleological idea that the most meaningful way to talk about nineteenth-century Italian opera is to relate it to the Risorgimento.

²³⁵ The libretto for *I pazzi per progetto* was written by Domenico Gilardoni, the same librettist with whom Donizetti collaborated for *Il diluvio*. As William Ashbrook notes of *I pazzi per progetto*, "The text by Gilardoni was an adaptation of a play of the same name by Giovanni Carlo di Cosenza, which in turn stemmed from a French farce, *Une visite à Bedlam*." William Ashbrook, *Donizetti and His Operas* (New York: Cambridge, 1982), 58.

Given that scholars have increasingly challenged the notion of any sort of one-to-one relationship between opera and Italian nationalist politics,²³⁶ understandings of sacredness could give a more three-dimensional perspective in this regard.

To parallel this dissertation's introductory encyclopedic ruminations, I conclude by returning to Pietro Gianelli's 1830 *Dizionario della musica sacra e profana* (considered briefly in [Chapter 3](#)) in order to examine three passages that offer an opening onto this tripartite intersection of musical sanctity, typology, and nationalism. At the broadest level, the title of Gianelli's dictionary presupposes a certain typological understanding of musical knowledge, in which music falls broadly into one of two "types": sacred music or secular music. Gianelli comments on this division near the end of his introductory remarks ("discorso preliminare"):

Therefore it was my task to define the musical terms, and to gather something of the theories, the eruditions, and the history concerning Secular Music. The Sacred, then, as that which is respectable for its antiquity and for the object to which it is consecrated, should not be neglected by me. For this reason I collected and explained the terms and other things concerning what can turn out useful to the clergy for the awareness of rituals, of the ancient writers, and to let them know that this part of music has in itself a greatness that must not be neglected, as it is in our time.²³⁷

Precisely because Gianelli's dictionary is devoted to "Sacred and Secular Music," it is noteworthy how little of his introductory remarks is devoted to overt reflection on this typological construction. Indeed, at times this dichotomous distinction seems to be almost an afterthought. For

²³⁶ Axel Körner, "Opera and Nation in Nineteenth-Century Italy: Conceptual and Methodological Approaches," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 14, no. 4 (2012): 393-99.

²³⁷ "Pertanto fu mio impegno definire i termini Musicali, e raccogliere quanto di teoriche, di erudizioni, di storia è spettante alla Musica Profana. La Sacra poi come quella ch'è rispettabile per la sua antichità, e per l'oggetto a cui è consacrata non deve essere trascurata da me. Perciò raccolsi, spiegai i termini, e quanto ad essa riguarda, cosa che potrà riuscir vantaggiosa agli Ecclesiastici per la cognizione de' Rituali, e degli antichi Scrittori, e per far loro conoscere che questa parte di Musica ha in se tanto di grande, che non deve essere trascurata, come si fa a' giorni nostri." Gianelli, *Dizionario della musica sacra e profana*, 13-14.

most of his introduction up to the passage quoted above, Gianelli has occupied himself with an impassioned act of history-telling regarding the tragic downfall not of sacred music or secular music, but rather simply of Music:

Therefore after having been of the highest quality in the most remote times; after having reached the highest grade of perfection among the most ancient nations of the earth; after having seen in Greece the greatest men carrying themselves to glory distinguishing themselves in it, and judging [it to be a] lack of education and almost shameful to not be familiar with it; after having been with the Romans in the temples to honor the gods, in the assemblies to make the banquets happier, in the amphitheaters to render the festivals more stately, and up to mourning at funerals the death of the deceased fellow citizens from Constantine's departure from Italy, from the fall of the Roman Empire, from the long domination of barbarous invaders, as Italy saw itself wretched and destroyed: thus Music was completely darkened and extinguished.²³⁸

The palpable nationalist overtones of Gianelli's writing continue as he traces the start of music's resurgence (*risorgimento*) through the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Gianelli's sweeping three thousand-year narrative culminates with a rousing call to arms regarding the broad study of Music, a phenomenon that he deems at once sacred and sanctifying:

Italians! You who have had the beautiful luck of breathing that air, of inhabiting that region that music chose for its special dwelling—set yourselves with all diligence to studying that art that occupied the great men in all times, which was the portion of the solemn scientific occupations of the great geniuses, and which rendered immortal so many of our compatriots; turn to the works of the great masters, consult their writings, give yourselves with all diligence to studying music, not develop[ing] the sole occupation of fingering some instrument, force yourselves to know it in every relationship, since it merits it, it being [the] science [that is] the

²³⁸ “Quindi dopo d’essere stata in sommo pregio nei più rimoti tempi, dopo di essere giunta al più alto grado di perfezione presso le più antiche nazioni della terra, dopo d’aver veduto nella Grecia i più grandi uomini recarsi a gloria il distinguersi in essa, e giudicare mancanza di educazione, e quasi ignominia il non conoscerla, dopo d’essere stata co’ Romani ne’ templi ad onorare le divinità, nelle adunanze a far più lieti i conviti, negli anfiteatri a rendere più pompose le feste, e fino a piangere ne’ funerali la morte degli estini concittadini dalla partenza di Costantino dall’Italia, dalla caduta del Romano Impero, dalla lunga dominazione de’ barbari invasori, come l’Italia si vide misera e distrutta, così la Musica fu del tutto oscurata ed estinta.” Gianelli, *Dizionario della musica sacra e profana*, 3-4.

most certain in its principles, the most sublime in its theories, the most useful in its marvelous effects.²³⁹

Although Gianelli's patriotic call to arms is undoubtedly more impassioned than his reflections on the typological distinction between sacred and secular music, it would be an oversimplification to say that investigating sacred and secular music becomes worthwhile because Gianelli links it to Italian nationalism as a concept with *a priori* value. In fact, I am tempted to see it the other way around: namely, that Gianelli simply understands the sacred/secular musical dichotomy to be meaningful, and therefore finds it to be a powerful platform from which to sanctify his own vision of patriotism. Coming to mind once again is Stewart and Strathern's cultural anthropological theory of ritual framing (cited in [Chapter 1](#)), in which a ritual act and its framing devices tend to blur together. Is Gianelli using sacred and secular music used to frame nationalist sentiment, or vice versa? Like a Gestalt psychological image in which figure and ground invert themselves unexpectedly, the synthesis of sanctity and nationalism is not easily separated.

There is one final instance of framing that I would highlight in this passage, and it reveals yet another layer of typological thought to Gianelli's writing. Specifically, the rhetoric in Gianelli's call to arms implies a resonant typological comparison between modern Italians and ancient Israelites: Gianelli frames Italians as the "Chosen People" with whom the glorious presence of Music has deigned to dwell, and their sacred priestly function is to devote themselves to musical knowledge. Perhaps in this way Gianelli's "Mosaic perspective" on the musical chorale's origins

²³⁹ "Italiani! Voi che avete avuta la bella sorte di respirare quell'aria, di abitare quella regione che scelse per sua speciale dimora la musica, ponetevi con ogni impegno allo studio di quell'arte che occupò i grandi uomini in tutti i tempi, che fu porzione delle gravi scientifiche occupazioni de'grand'ingegni, e che rese immortali tanti e tanti nostri compatriotti; ricorrete alle opere de' grandi maestri, consultate i loro scritti, datevi con tutto l'impegno allo studio della musica, non formi la sola occupazione il tasteggio di qualche strumento, sforzatevi di conoscerla in ogni rapporto, poiché lo merita, essendo ella scienza delle più certe ne' suoi principj, delle più sublimi nelle sue teoriche, delle più utili ne' suoi effetti meravigliosi." Ibid., 12-13.

(discussed in [Chapter 3](#)) comes into focus. In an age when Italy was seeking its patriarchs, Gianelli's Catholic typological comparison invites further material considerations of living Jewish communities following the Jewish Emancipation, and the relationship between Catholic and Jewish perspectives on the formation of Italian nationalist identities.²⁴⁰

Even at this point, it is difficult to manage the reflexive nature of identity and perspective that has permeated this dissertation. Thus, in using “sacred music” to think about *Mosè* and *Il diluvio* (and vice versa), it has not been my intention to examine every possible facet of this category or these works—or even of my own perspective on them, for that matter. What does it mean, for example, to see one's thoughts unfold in synthetic parallelism, a rhetorical construction reminiscent of ancient Hebrew poetry? Yet here I must stop. For all the benefits of reflexive self-awareness about one's own eyes, at the end of the day one's task is but to see.

²⁴⁰ For an overview on this topic, see Marina Beer and Anna Foa, eds., *Ebrei, minoranze e Risorgimento: Storia, cultura, letteratura* (Rome: Viella, 2013).

APPENDIX A

NEAPOLITAN THEATER PERFORMANCES DURING LENT, 1818

What titles did Neapolitan theaters actually stage during Lent in the early nineteenth century? This Appendix addresses this question by listing all officially registered performances at all major Neapolitan musical and prose-based theaters for every day during Lent of 1818 (see [Table 2](#) at the end of this Appendix). The information in Table 2 is reproduced from a government register (hereafter the “register”) conserved at Naples’ State Archive that logs all performances at all major Neapolitan theaters between 1813 and 1832.²⁴¹ Because the general type of data that can be gleaned from the Register does not vary significantly from year to year, I have chosen to reproduce data only from Lent of 1818 as more or less representative of the Lenten seasons between 1818 and 1830.

The value of this register lies in the broad cross-sectional view of Neapolitan theatrical life that it reveals. Among other things, scanning the Register is a useful way to dampen the prescriptive overtones of the phrase “Lenten theater.” Lenten theater readily suggests genres like sacred drama that enact “religious” stories, and certainly these were a part of Lent; yet in rushing to label certain genres or works as “Lenten,” there is a risk of overlooking those works staged during Lent that are not overtly marked as religious. In fact, programming at Naples’ theaters during Lent appears largely quotidian when compared to the rest of the year. Additionally, the

²⁴¹ “Registri relativi agli spettacoli ed alla revisione teatrale–1813 al 1832,” Soprintendenza Teatri: Teatri e spettacoli–Deputazione–Soprintendenza Commissione amministrativa Prefettura, container 3, State Archive, Naples. The data in Table 2 is found in volume II, pp. 100v–111v.

Register facilitates considering how specific stories transcended different prose-based and musical theater traditions during Lent. In short, considering what was actually staged during Lent at a variety of different theaters yields a broader perspective on the diversity of “Lenten theater” in Naples.

One of the first things to notice regarding [Table 2](#) is simply how active Neapolitan theaters were during Lent. To begin with, the theaters were more often open than not during Lent—in 1818, theater was permitted on thirty-three out of the forty-six days between Ash Wednesday and Holy Saturday.²⁴² Furthermore, between three and eight theaters on any given night offered a variety of works; these included both prosaic and musical genres, as well as performances done in the Neapolitan dialect.²⁴³

When compared to the other years between 1818 and 1830, 1818 was fairly typical regarding the number of Old Testament-based theater productions staged during Lent.²⁴⁴ Of the approximately 170 registered performances during Lent of 1818, twenty-three seem to have been based on Old Testament stories. Two of these productions are based on stories from the Pentateuch: the San Carlo’s five performances of “Moses in Egypt” (by Rossini; 5, 7, 8, 10, and 12 March), and one prose production on “Joseph in Egypt” at the Nuovo Theater (23 February). The rest of

²⁴² The pattern of Lenten theater closures in 1818—all theaters closed for the first four days of Lent, for every Friday in March, and for all of Holy week, with the theaters reopening on Easter—is typical of the other years between 1818 and 1830. This pattern has not been verified for 1824, as the data from this year is missing from the register. A definite known exception to this pattern is Lent of 1826, when all the theaters were closed for the entirety of Lent on account of a period of Jubilee proclaimed by the Pope (discussed in [Chapter 2](#)).

²⁴³ For greater detail on the variety of Naples’ different theaters, see DellDonna, *Opera, Theatrical Culture and Society in Late Eighteenth-Century Naples*.

²⁴⁴ While the register logs fewer theatrical representations of Old Testament stories in the mid- and later-1820s, this does not conclusively prove that these were becoming less common. For example, in the later 1820s the register generally lists fewer productions on any given day, a phenomenon due in part to the fact that puppet theater stops being included in the register. Furthermore, it should also be considered that smaller theatrical productions may not be listed in the official register.

the performances are based on stories that come chronologically later in the Old Testament, and many of them deal more directly with issues of contending for Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Two stories come from the book of Judges; these included three prose productions on the Israelite judge Samson at the theater known as “Pupi al Molo,” or “Puppets at the Pier” (17, 20 February; 2 March); there was also a prose production at the San Carlino entitled “The Stopping of the Sun” (10 March).²⁴⁵ Contending for Jerusalem is also a theme found in numerous works staged about the Babylonian captivity. There were ten musical performances on “The Destruction of Jerusalem” at the Fenice (26 and 27 February; 1, 3, 5, 7, 12, and 14 March), Nuovo (28 February), and San Ferdinando theaters (8 March).²⁴⁶ Additionally, the San Carlino staged a work entitled “Nebuchadnezzar” (13 February), recorded in the Bible as the Babylonian king at the time of the Exile who enslaved the Hebrews; the San Ferdinando Theater staged a production entitled “The Transformation of Nebuchadnezzar” (19 February); and the Pietà Theater, which appears only once in the table, staged a production entitled “Belshazzar’s Feast” (8 February).

Because these twenty-three performances comprise just over ten percent of the approximately 170 listed registered performances in the table, one might conclude that Old Testament stories were only a minor part of theatrical life during Lent. While this is statistically

²⁴⁵ The apparent biblical context for this story is a battle between Joshua and the pagan king of Jerusalem (Joshua 10).

²⁴⁶ It seems likely that the event referred to is the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, rather than the city’s later destruction by the Romans. There were at least two different sacred dramas on the Babylonian captivity entitled *La Distruzione di Gerusalemme* known in Naples: one by Giuseppe Giordani (1787), and another by Pietro Guglielmi (1803). For further information on the place of these two works within the broader scope of Lenten tragic theater in Naples, see DellDonna, *Opera, Theatrical Culture and Society in Late Eighteenth-Century Naples*, 147-49. For more information on the history of Lenten sacred drama in Naples before 1818, see Franco Piperno, “Il Mosè in Egitto e la tradizione napoletana di opere bibliche,” in *Gioachino Rossini, 1792–1992, il testo e la scena: convegno internazionale di studi, Pesaro, 25-28 giugno 1992*, ed. Paolo Fabbri, 255- 271 (Pesaro: Fondazione Rossini Pesaro, 1994), at 269-271.

true, it is also these works that have the strongest claim at having a special connection with the Lenten season. Significantly, many of the works that appear listed in this table as having been performed during Lent—*Otello*, *Angiolo del Duca*, *La Cenerentola*, *La Roccia di Frauenstein*, to name a few—were also performed during Carnival of 1818. While Lenten performances of these works may have been regulated by Lenten rules inside the theater, the titles themselves were performed freely during both seasons. By contrast, the Register logs no known theatrical performances of Old Testament stories during Carnival of 1818. This suggests that Old Testament narratives were somehow particular to Lent, and that their appearance on theatrical stages constituted a cultural observance of the Lenten season.

Clearly the Old Testament was not the only source of theater meaningfully linked to Lent as a religious season. Of particular interest are a series of puppet productions at the “Pupi al Molo” entitled “Mysteries of the Passion of Jesus Christ” (23 February; 9, 10, 11, and 14 March). Furthermore, there were a number of non-Bible-based stories on the theme of “Contending for Jerusalem.” One of these is the Siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (“The Fall of Herod’s Temple” at “Pupi al Molo,” 22 February). There were also a number of Medieval Crusader stories about the Conquest of Jerusalem; these included five performances of “Jerusalem Delivered”²⁴⁷ at the “Pupi al Molo” (12, 14, 19, and 28 February; 7 March), and one performance of “Erminia”²⁴⁸ at the Nuovo Theater (3 March). Yet beyond cases like these it becomes difficult to speak meaningfully about the relationship between Lent and theater programming. Certainly other works listed in this table have moralizing elements that might be linked to a spirit of Lenten didacticism, but to

²⁴⁷ These performances may have been modeled upon the Torquato Tasso’s 1581 epic poem of the same name that deals with the crusades. See Torquato Tasso, *Jerusalem Delivered: An English Prose Version*, trans. and ed. Ralph Nash (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987).

²⁴⁸ Erminia is a character in Tasso’s *Jerusalem Delivered*. See *ibid.*

overemphasize such connections would distort the overall shape of this data. Rather, the apparent conclusion is that not all elements of theatrical experience during Lent, at least as regards programming, were reductively “Lenten”; to claim so paints a misleading picture of Lent as a totalizing season.

In general, my approach in preparing [Table 2](#) has been to reproduce as nearly as possible what appears in the Register. In the original document, each side of a folio generally contains the theater listings for two days, with each opening thus containing listings for four days; each entry includes the calendar date, a list of theaters open on that day, the names of the works being staged at each theater, and whether those works are considered to be prose-based (*prosa*) or musical (*musica*) in nature.²⁴⁹ My basic presentation of the table differs only slightly in that I have used a lined table-format for ease of reading and for condensing space, and that I have added in the days of the week for reference. Furthermore, I have included translations of titles in order to convey a general sense of the sorts of stories performed during Lent. Italian literary titles do not always yield poetic English translations; in such cases I have erred on the clunky side of formal equivalence rather than dynamic equivalence in translation. I have generally not translated titles that simply juxtapose two personal names with the Italian *e* (“and”). In general, I have only Anglicized names in the case of biblical characters. Translations are given the first time a title appears in the table; for musical works, I have also included the name of the composer the first time the title appears.²⁵⁰ All translations and editorial comments appear in [brackets].

²⁴⁹ The Register includes no information regarding the works’ composers, librettists, playwrights, or any other details of the performance. Such information, even if known or readily available to the scribe, was presumably ultimately irrelevant to the bureaucratic purposes of book-keeping.

²⁵⁰ The names of the composers of the musical works cited in the table have been obtained through general internet searches as well as the following source: Alfred Loewenberg, *Annals of Opera: 1597–1940*, with an introduction by Edward J. Dent, 3d ed. rev. and corrected (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978).

Finally, it is worth noting that the Neapolitan *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie* (Journal of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies) often printed daily announcements regarding upcoming theater performances in Naples. While the government register tends to be more comprehensive in the works that it lists, on one occasion I have supplemented an entry in Table 2 with data drawn from the *Giornale*.

Table 2. Neapolitan Theater Performances during Lent, 1818

Date	Theater; Title of Work Performed
4 February [Ash Wednesday]	Quaresima—Riposo [Lent—Break]
5 February [Thursday]	Riposo [Break]
6 February [Friday]	Riposo [Break]
7 February [Saturday]	Riposo [Break]
8 February [Sunday]	S. Carlo = Boadicea [Francesco Morlacchi] Fiorentini = musica = Comingio pittore [Comingio the Painter / Valentino Fioravanti ²⁵¹] Nuovo = prosa = Il Di d'una fanciulla: far male per far bene [A Girl's Day: Doing Bad to Do Good] S. Carlino = musica = I pretendenti delusi [The Disappointed Suitors / Giuseppe Mosca] Fenice = musica = La Roccia [di Frauenstein – The Cliff of Frauenstein / Giovanni Simone Mayr] Pietà = prosa = Il convito di Baldassarre [Belshazzar's Feast] [Pupi al] Molo [“Puppets at the Pier”] = Lucade
9 February [Monday]	Fiorentini = Comingio pittore

²⁵¹ There are a number of operatic titles in this table that refer to “Adelaide” and/or “Comingio.” The relationship of these operas has been explained succinctly by Stefano Castelvechi: “Giacomo Antonio Gualzetti’s adaptation of Madame de Tencin’s *Mémoires du comte de Comminge* into a theatrical trilogy (*Gli amori di Comingio, Adelaide maritata, Adelaide e Comingio romiti*) was first staged in 1789, printed a number of times, and still performed in Naples well into the second half of the nineteenth century [. . .]. Most notable among the operas based on that narrative tradition are those constituting the ‘Adelaide trilogy’ presented to Neapolitan audiences by Andrea Leone Tottola and Valentino Fioravanti (*Adelaide maritata*, Teatro Nuovo, 1812 (also known as *Comingio pittore*); *La morte d’Adelaide*, Teatro dei Fiorentini, 1817; *Gli amori di Adelaide e Comingio*, Teatro dei Fiorentini, 1818) and Gaetano Rossi and Giovanni Pacini’s *Adelaide e Comingio* (Milan, Teatro Re, 1817) – all of which belong by rights to the genre of *opera semiseria*.” Stefano Castelvechi, *Sentimental Opera: Questions of Genre in the Age of Bourgeois Drama* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 217n23.

	<p>Nuovo = prosa = Giulietta Capelli [Juliet Capulet] S. Carlino = La Cenerentola [Cinderella / Gioacchino Rossini] Fenice = La Roccia Molo = China luna [undecipherable]</p>
10 February [Tuesday]	<p>S. Carlo = Boadicea S. Carlino = Angiolo del Duca Fenice = Pamela [nubile – Pamela Unmarried / Pietro Generali] Pupi Molo = I sventurati amanti [The Unlucky Lovers]</p>
11 February [Wednesday]	<p>Fiorentini = Comingio Eremita [Comingio the Hermit] Nuovo = Giulietta Cappelli Fenice = La roccia S. Carlino = La Cenerentola Pupi Molo = Ginevra d'Almieri</p>
12 February [Thursday]	<p>S. Carlo = musica = Boadicea Fiorentini = musica = La morte di Adelaide [The Death of Adelaide / Valentino Fioravanti] Nuovo = prosa = Il portatore d'acqua [The Water Carrier] S. Carlino = musica = La Cenerentola Fenice = musica = Adelina [Pietro Generali] Pupi al Molo = prosa = La Gerusalemme liberata [Jerusalem Delivered]</p>
13 February [Friday]	<p>Nuovo = prosa = Matilde S. Carlino = prosa = Nabucco [Nebuchadnezzar] Fenice = musica = La Roccia di Frauenstein Pupi al Molo = prosa = Odda</p>
14 February [Saturday]	<p>Fiorentini = musica = La morte di Adelaide Nuovo = prosa = Zaire S. Carlino = prosa = Angiolo del Duca Fenice = musica = Amalia e Carlo [Pietro Carlo Guglielmi] Pupi al Molo = prosa = La Gerusalemme liberata</p>
15 February [Sunday]	<p>S. Carlo = musica = Boadicea Fiorentini = musica = La morte di Adelaide Nuovo = prosa = I due amici di Lione [The Two Male Friends of Lyon] S. Ferdinando = prosa = Angiolo del Duca S. Carlino = musica = La Cenerentola Fenice = musica = Amalia e Carlo Pupi al Molo = prosa = Il Simulacro animato [The Animated Simulacrum]</p>
16 February [Monday]	<p>Nuovo = prosa = La figlia cattiva [The Bad Daughter] S. Carlino = prosa = Angiolo del Duca Fenice = musica = Pamela nubile</p>

	Pupi al Molo = prosa = La Contessa di Barcellona [The Countess of Barcelona]
17 February [Tuesday]	Fiorentini = musica = Comingio pittore S. Carlino = prosa = La presa di Catania [The Conquest of Catania] Fenice = musica = La Roccia di Frauenstein Pupi al Molo = prosa = Sansone [Samson]
18 February [Wednesday]	Fiorentini = musica = La morte di Adelaide Nuovo = prosa = La Zelinda S. Carlino = musica = I pretendenti delusi Fenice = musica = Amalia e Carlo Pupi al Molo = prosa = Il barbaro pietoso [The Compassionate Barbarian]
19 February [Thursday]	S. Carlo = musica = Otello [Gioachino Rossini] Nuovo = prosa = Le gelosie di Zelinda, e Lindoro [The Jealousies of Zelinda and Lindoro] S. Ferdinando = prosa = La trasformazione di Nabucco [The Transformation of Nebuchadnezzar] S. Carlino = musica = La Cenerentola Fenice = musica = Amalia e Carlo Pupi al Molo = prosa = La Gerusalemme liberata
20 February [Friday]	Nuovo = prosa = Le inquietudini di Zelinda [The Anxieties of Zelinda] S. Carlino = prosa = Angiolo del Duca Fenice = musica = Pamela nubile Pupi al Molo = prosa = Sansone
21 February [Saturday]	S. Carlino = musica = Carlotta e Werter [Carlo Coccia] Fenice = musica = La Roccia di Frauenstein Pupi al Molo = prosa = Gli affetti in cimento [The Affections in Endeavour]
22 February [Sunday]	S. Carlo = musica = Boadicea Fiorentini = musica = Comingio pittore Nuovo = prosa = Misanthropia e pentimento [Misanthropy and Regret] S. Ferdinando = musica = Amalia e Carlo S. Carlino = musica = Carlotta e Werter Fenice = musica = La Roccia di Frauenstein Teatrino della Sorte = prosa = La caduta del Tempio di Erodino [The Fall of Herod's Temple] Pupi al Molo = prosa = La Contessa di Barcellona
23 February [Monday]	Fiorentini = musica = Comingio pittore Nuovo = prosa = Giuseppe in Egitto [Joseph in Egypt] S. Carlino = prosa = Carlotta e Werter Fenice = musica = Elena e Corrado [Stefano Pavesi] Pupi al Molo = prosa = La Passione di G[esù] C[risto] [The Passion of Jesus Christ]

24 February [Tuesday]	<p>Fiorentini = La morte di Adelaide S. Carlino = prosa = L'enorme colpevole [The Enormous Culprit] Fenice = musica = Amalia e Carlo Pupi al Molo = prosa = Il Colombo nell'Indie [Columbus in the Indies]</p>
25 February [Wednesday]	<p>Fiorentini = musica = La morte di Adelaide Nuovo = prosa = Giuseppe in Egitto S. Carlino = musica = Carlotta e Werter Fenice = musica = Adelina Pupi al Molo = prosa = Adelina</p>
26 February [Thursday]	<p>S. Carlo = musica = Boadicea Nuovo = prosa = Il padre di Famiglia [The Father of the Family] S. Carlino = musica = Carlotta e Werter Fenice = musica = La distruzione di Gerusalemme [The Destruction of Jerusalem] Pupi al Molo = prosa = Il naufragio fortunato [The Fortunate Shipwreck]</p>
27 February [Friday]	<p>Fiorentini = musica = La morte di Adelaide Nuovo = prosa = Il benefattore, e l'orfano [The Benefactor and the Orphan] S. Carlino = prosa = Angiolo del Duca Fenice = musica = La distruzione di Gerusalemme Pupi al Molo = prosa = Il salto di Leucade [Leucade's Leap]</p>
28 February [Saturday]	<p>Nuovo = musica = La distruzione di Gerusalemme S. Carlino = musica = Carlotta e Werter Fenice = musica = Amalia e Carlo Pupi al Molo = prosa = La Gerusalemme liberata</p>
1 March [Sunday]	<p>S. Carlo = musica = Boadicea Fiorentini = musica = Gli amori di Adelaide, e Comingio [The Loves of Adelaide and Comingio / Valentino Fioravanti] Nuovo = prosa = La sgomberatura [The Evacuation] S. Ferdinando = musica = Amalia, e Carlo S. Carlino = musica = Carlotta, e Werter Fenice = musica = La distruzione di Gerusalemme Teatrino della Sorte = prosa = La trasformazione di Nabucco Pupi al Molo = prosa = Il Guerin meschino [The Wretched Cross-Eyed Man]</p>
2 March [Monday]	<p>Fiorentini = musica = Gli amori di Adelaide, e Comingio S. Carlino = musica = Carlotta, e Werter Fenice = musica = Amalia, e Carlo Pupi al Molo = prosa = Sansone</p>

3 March [Tuesday]	<p>Fiorentini = musica = Gli amori di Adelaide, e Comingio Nuovo = prosa = Erminia S. Carlino = prosa = Odda Fenice = musica = La distruzione di Gerusalemme Pupi al Molo = prosa = L'avvocato dei poveri [The Advocate of the Poor]</p>
4 March [Wednesday]	<p>Fiorentini = musica = Gli amori di Adelaide, e Comingio Nuovo = prosa = La comediante [The Female Actor] S. Carlino = prosa = Angiolo del Duca Fenice = musica = Amalia, e Carlo Pupi al Molo = prosa = [blank]</p>
5 March [Thursday]	<p>S. Carlo = musica = Mosè in Egitto [Moses in Egypt / Gioachino Rossini] Nuovo = prosa = Il disinteressante e Il disperato per eccesso di buon cuore [The Man Losing Interest, and The Man Frantic for an Excess of Good Heart] S. Carlino = musica = Carlotta, e Werter Fenice = musica = La distruzione di Gerusalemme Pupi alla Sorte = prosa = Annella</p>
6 March [Friday]	<p>Vacanza in tutti i teatri, in occasione del p[ri]mo Venerdì di Marzo [Vacation in all the theaters for the first Friday in March]</p>
7 March [Saturday]	<p>S. Carlo = musica = Mosè in Egitto Fiorentini = musica = Gli amori di Adelaide, e Comingio Nuovo = prosa = Gesner S. Carlino = musica = La Cenerentola Fenice = musica = La distruzione di Gerusalemme Pupi al Molo = prosa = La Gerusalemme liberata</p>
8 March [Sunday]	<p>S. Carlo = musica = Mosè in Egitto Fiorentini = musica = Gli amori di Adelaide, e Comingio Nuovo = prosa = Il venditor d'aceto [The Oil Vendor] S. Ferdinando = musica = La distruzione di Gerusalemme S. Carlino = musica = Carlotta, e Werter Fenice = musica = Amalia, e Carlo Teatrino della Sorte = prosa = Adelaide, e Comingio romiti [Adelaide and Comingio, the Hermits] Pupi al Molo = prosa = Il Colombo nell'Indie</p>
9 March [Monday]	<p>Fiorentini = musica = Gli amori di Adelaide, e Comingio Nuovo = prosa = Saul Warin[g]ton S. Carlino = musica = Pamela nubile Pupi al Molo = prosa = I misteri della Passione di G[esù] C[risto]</p>
10 March [Tuesday]	<p>S. Carlo = musica = Mosè in Egitto Nuovo = prosa = Isabella de Dreux S. Carlino = prosa = La fermata del Sole [The Stopping of the Sun]</p>

	Fenice = musica = La Roccia di Frauenstein Pupi al Molo = prosa = I misteri della Passione di G[esù] C[risto]
11 March [Wednesday]	Fiorentini = musica = Gli amori di Adelaide, e Comingio Nuovo = musica = Lo ntrico de le feneste a Posilleco [pe guasta li matrimmuonie, musica in dialetto napoletano – music in the Neapolitan dialect ²⁵²] S. Carlino = musica = Carlotta, e Werter Pupi al Molo = prosa = I misteri della Passione di G[esù] C[risto]
12 March [Thursday]	S. Carlo = musica = Mosè in Egitto Fiorentini = musica = Comingio pittore Nuovo = prosa = Isabella de Dreux S. Carlino = musica = La Cenerentola Fenice = musica = La distruzione di Gerusalemme Pupi al Molo = prosa = La Contessa di Barcellona
13 March [Friday]	Vacanza in tutti i Teatri, in occasione del 2.do Venerdì di Marzo [Vacation in all the theaters for the second Friday in March]
14 March [Saturday]	Fiorentini = musica = La morte di Adelaide Nuovo = prosa = Il ritratto di Fielding – Un curioso accidente [The Portrait of Fielding – A Curious Accident] S. Carlino = musica = Carlotta, e Werter Fenice = musica = La distruzione di Gerusalemme Pupi al Molo = prosa = Si vedono i misteri della Passione di Gesù Cristo
15 March [Sunday]	Vacanza generale, in occasione della Domenica delle Palme [General vacation for Palm Sunday]
16 March [Monday]	Vacanza in tutti i Teatri, in occasione del Lunedì Santo [Vacation in all the theaters for Holy Monday]
17 March [Tuesday]	Vacanza in occasione di Martedì Santo [Vacation for Holy Tuesday]
18 March [Wednesday]	Vacanza gen[era]le in occasione del Mercoledì Santo [General vacation for Holy Wednesday]
19 March [Thursday]	Vacanza gen[era]le in occasione di Giovedì Santo [General vacation for Holy Thursday]
20 March [Friday]	Vacanza come ieri in occasione del Venerdì Santo [Vacation as yesterday for Holy Friday]
21 March [Saturday]	Vacanza gen[era]le in occasione del Sabato Santo [General vacation for Holy Saturday]

²⁵² The bracketed portion of this entry is not present in the register, but it does appear in the announcement of this performance as published in the *Giornale del Regno delle Due Sicilie*.

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